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### **A geographical approach to trust in tourism**

Within tourism research, trust has largely been conceptualised from psychological perspectives, allowing insights into the mechanisms through which resident/stakeholder relations generate trust. Whilst this work is valuable in understanding dynamics of trust relations, such focus has meant less attention has been given to the ways space influences trust in tourism contexts. Thus a geographical approach is put forth to understanding trust in tourism. Through observation and semi-structured interviews concerned with the implementation of a community tourism project in southwest China, insights are provided illustrating how trust is inscribed in place. It is shown that in the Chinese context, cultural place based specificities relating to pre-existing governance structures, social hierarchies, and the intersection of power, knowledge and trust influence the (in)abilities of NGOs to develop trust with specific residents. More meaningful dialogue between tourism research and geographical conceptualisations of trust is called for – as a way to attend to spatial and scalar differences in understandings of trust within tourism contexts.

在旅游研究中，通常是从心理学的角度对信任进行概念界定，以使人们能够通过居民/利益相关者之间的关系洞察信任产生的机制。尽管这些研究有利于理解信任关系的动态模式，但这也意味着对空间如何影响信任的研究则关注较

少。因此，本文提出用地理学的方法来理解旅游中的信任。通过对中国西南地区一个社区旅游项目的观察和半结构化访谈，本文考察了信任在地方是如何被刻画的。结果表明，在中国语境中，治理结构、社会层级等文化特性以及权力、知识和信任的交织会影响 NGO 与特定居民建立信任关系的能力。最后，号召旅游研究与信任的地理概念之间需要进行更有意义的对话，以此关注旅游情境中信任在空间和数量上的不同。

**Keywords:** trust; power; space; knowledge; tourism development; China

关键词：信任；权力；空间；知识；旅游发展；中国

## **1. Introduction**

Trust is crucial to touristic stakeholder relations; high levels of trust can assist in alleviating conflicts, reduce tension and assist in reaching consensus among different stakeholders (Czakon & Czernek, 2016; Nielsen, 2011). Whilst an emerging area of research, tourism scholarship has prioritised focus on trust relations, primarily between community and institutions; a precedence that recognises the importance of residents in tourism development (Nunkoo, 2015; Nunkoo, Ramkissoon & Gursoy 2012). This work is prefaced on the understanding that public support is vital to ‘successful’ tourism development (Luhiste, 2006), whilst a lack of trust is detrimental to the democratic development process of tourism – potentially rendering social instability. In consequence, this work remains concerned with how relations unfold through the direct and powerful influence of government and elite stakeholders (Yang, Ryan & Zhang, 2013).

Declines in trust relations are not just felt through localised projects, rather repercussions occur across scale; whereby a decline in trust with stakeholders through community projects influences trust with related stakeholders at the regional and national scale (Christensen & Laegreid, 2005). It is configured that if there is a high level of trust in an institution, then positive support for tourism development follows (e.g. Earle, Siegrist, & Gutscher, 2007; Hetherington, 2004; Rudolph & Evans, 2005). Preconfigured trust relations held by residents towards institutions have likewise been found to influence judgements concerning the acceptability of development projects and politics (Bronfman, Vazquez & Dorantes, 2009). If residents trust an institution they have a tendency to keep demands reasonable (Harisalo &

Stenvall, 2003). Conversely, low trust in a public institution is understood to make an activity unacceptable for citizens (Bronfman *et. al.*, 2009).

Within this work, trust is generally understood as a psychological concept, signifying both an individual's positive attitude towards another and a confidence that the other will perform their expected obligations (Nguyen & Rose, 2009). Beyond tourism, though, trust is conceptualised in much broader terms (Withers, 2018). In addition to its psychological dimension, trust is also thought to signify interpersonal interaction and exchange (Blau, 1964; Lewicki & Bunker, 1995), as well as being conceptualised as a social phenomenon related to culture, institution and social structure (Fukuyama, 1995; Luhmann, 1979). Tourism's concern with the psychological dimensions of trust has ensured that prioritisation has remained with individualised knowledge and perceptions held by residents towards stakeholders. Whilst such work has been influential in understanding trust in tourism, it has tended to overlook the ways place and space matter to trust development.

We thus attempt to extend conceptualisation of the trust in tourism literature by taking particular attention with the spatial dimensions of trust. In doing so, we hope to explore how specificities of place intersect with trust in a tourism development context, resulting in particular trust relations that go beyond psychological dimensions to explore how culture, politics and the social are situated through place. The research thus asks: 'how does trust unfold through a place specific tourism project, between residents and a Chinese government-organised NGO?'

The research begins with a review of the academic research on trust, specifically, moving beyond tourism scholarship to examine the geographical dimensions and the intimate relations between trust, power and knowledge. The Chinese case is next introduced through examination of the tourist development project and an outline of the key stakeholders, before the qualitative method is outlined. Turning to discussion, we highlight the importance of a geographical approach to trust in tourism through three themes: ‘antecedents of trust’, ‘governance structures of (mis)trust’ and ‘trust/power/knowledge’. The first illustrates the ways cultures of mistrust pre-exist tourism development projects in China, in response to the nation’s unique structures of NGO governance. The second, identifies the Chinese concept of ‘guanxi’ as crucial in understanding how informal social hierarchies circulate local tourism development projects – rendering an elite group of decision makers and marginalising residents. Finally, discussion turns to examination of trust’s relationship to knowledge and power through the specificities of the case study – where knowledge is shown to form a central tenant in the formation of trust and power – offering opportunity to re-establish hierarchical social and governance structures. Taking these ideas together, we finally turn to a discussion highlighting the ways these findings present a case for geographical approaches to trust in tourism.

## **2. Trust, tourism, space and power**

### ***2.1 The spatial dimensions of trust in tourism***

Geographers have not undertaken sustained engagement with trust (Withers, 2018). Trust though, is intrinsically geographical; in that, trust varies in its meaning within and among different social groups, over time, and over space (Hardin, 2002). Only very recently have the

spatial dimensions of trust gained traction within the discipline, as geographers have called for the need to evaluate the ways trust is secured and trust relations are inscribed through space (Withers, 2018). Rather than being wholly something that takes place through personal relationships, as prefaced in much of the trust in tourism literature - trust is also structural, spatial and relational. Trust is not solely individualised; trust is socially constructed and socially situated. Trust exists within nations and constitutions, and circulates differently depending on the cultural context. In Chinese culture, for example, trust has been found to be particularistic, situational and guanxi-related (Fei, 1992; Weber, 1959). 'Guan' referring to 'barrier', whilst 'xi' meaning 'family' or 'to connect' (Li, Lai & Feng, 2007). Combined, 'guanxi' indicates particularistic ties rooted in a common background and experience between individuals, which facilitates exchange (Tsui & Farh, 1997). Trust among family in China is considered high, whilst generally trust towards larger collectives is low. In addition to kinship relations, the emotional connotation contained in social communications has an important influence on the level of Chinese trust (Li & Liang, 2002). A person is trustworthy when they are perceived as sincere, honest, credible, reliable and capable; with sincerity holding weight over one's ability. Recognising such spatial distinctions in understandings of trust, we argue that examination is required in regards to how trust within tourism relations are 'inscribed in space' (Shapin, 1994, p.245) and how trust is secured, over time and through institutional, social and cultural performances (Withers, 2018).

Understanding the spatial dimensions of trust is particularly crucial within the context of this research because tourism development is implemented in specific ways within China, and yet Western constructions of tourism development prevail. Increasingly, tourism projects in

China are implemented through Chinese government organised NGOs. Terminology that at first appears to be a contradiction in terms. Whilst by definition NGOs are non-governmental organisations, within China they are established through government structures, a format that ensures governmental influence (*ibid.*). Contrasting with Western understandings of NGOs that emerged through state and market failure, Chinese NGOs grew from the impetus of political revolution and market economy development (White, Howell & Shang, 1996), resulting in their distinct characteristics. In the twentieth century, the western world encountered the crises in the modern welfare state and economic development, which stimulated the increase in voluntary organisations to serve as a non-profit distributing, self-governing and private sector, separating market and state (Salamon, 1994). Despite distinct differences between China and Western nations, western specific approaches were introduced to Chinese scholarship by Salamon in the late 1990s, and were slowly adopted by key scholars in China. Western-led approaches thus gradually became the dominant paradigm for NGO study in China (Ma, 2002).

Under the influence of this approach, the ‘myth of pure virtue’ (Salamon, 1994, p.118) enabled NGOs to gain prominence as a trustworthy sector for providing involvement and mutual aid to the beneficiary community. To control domestic NGOs more productively, the Chinese government implemented a dual registration management system. This means the Civil Affairs Office is responsible for the registration and management of NGOs. Moreover, before gaining formal registration, each NGO must first have a supervisory governmental agency to be accountable for its actions (Zhuang et al., 2011). As a consequence, the supervisory agency has become the ‘leader’ of the NGO, narrowing the autonomous space of the organisations. The



limited authority granted to NGOs has contributed to the difficulty in community participation in China (Bao & Sun, 2007).

Many scholars (e.g. Barkin & Bouchez, 2002; Frilund, 2018; Kennedy & Dornan, 2009; Scheyvens, 2012) have claimed that NGOs perform a positive role within tourism development, especially in encouraging local community to participate in and drive the project themselves. Certain researchers, however, hold the view that there is a lack of effective methods for measuring and evaluating the impact of tourism-focused NGOs (Kennedy & Dornan, 2009). This leads to a tendency to overemphasize the positive role of NGOs in this area, essentialising, idealizing and romanticizing the relationship between NGOs and community without attending to the ways relations unfold in specific ways through place (Pike, 1999). Within the Chinese context, it also overshadows the unique structural governance placed on NGOs, which works to inhibit autonomy and community participation.

## ***2.2 Trust, Power and Knowledge***

Important in making sense of the role of China's government organised NGOs is recognising the power governmental institutions possess in implementing tourism projects. Trust and power are intimately connected, so much so that it is now understood within tourism development scholarship that examination of trust cannot take place without attending to power (Öberg & Svensson, 2012). Power is a crucial consideration in community based approaches to tourism development because it allows insights into the ways residence perceive and accept various projects (Nunkoo & Gursoy, 2016). It assists in making sense of the various interests involved

in any tourism project, and is crucial in informing considerations made by tourism planners and policy makers (Hall, 1994).

Theoretical discussion is required in understanding the important role power undertakes in tourism development. Tourism scholars have drawn on a range of theorisations in their use of power (e.g. Hall, 2003), yet it is Foucault's (1978) conceptualisation that has tended to dominate the literature. For Foucault (*ibid.*) power is considered in terms of its mechanisms and strategies – with focus given to what it can *do*, rather than what it *is*. Power, here, becomes fluid; whereby it is constantly being brought into being through dynamic and unstable relations. Whilst it is bound up in formal laws and rules, it is not solely constituted through such processes. Rather, power is decentralised. It is not a matter of one group or one person exercising control over another. Power, following Foucault, is rather manifested in all social relations (linguistic, familial, institutional and so on). Moreover, power is linked to knowledge, whilst knowledge induces effects of power. By way of example, those who possess knowledge regarding the decision making processes of a tourism development project, are thought to possess power to control the implementation of that project. Rather than being linked to any innate truth or representation, knowledge is a social construction utilised to generate 'truths' regarding the ways things work. Such knowledge 'truths' are powerful in the way they exercise control over practices and performances. Those perceived to possess knowledge, are considered those who possess power. The general idea within scholarship is that power asymmetries have a negative influence on trust – depending on the place-based context (Oskarsson, Svensson & Öberg, 2009). Thus, any treatise on trust should take power seriously, and focus on the relationship between trust and power (Öberg & Svensson, 2010).

Whilst power is now understood as one of the central considerations in understanding tourism development, its examination in the literature has dominated discussion (Nunkoo & Gursoy, 2016). In consequence, it has been claimed that a somewhat reductionist framing has resulted, ensuring many tourism projects are now framed through a politics of power – generating difficulties in understanding how other elements, such as trust, might hold influence in tourism development (Stein & Harper, 2003). For this reason, whilst power is here recognised as crucial to successful tourism development, in this study precedence is granted to examinations of trust within the context of China, and the *Beautiful Village Project* (美丽乡村项目).

### **3. Context and setting**

Since Xi Jinping became the president of China in 2012, the federal government has placed poverty alleviation at the top of the political agenda. Contrasting with the previous ‘one-size-fits-all’ methods of poverty reduction, Xi’s policy of ‘targeted poverty alleviation’ (精准扶贫) claims to emphasize precise poverty identification, specific support, long-term and accurate evaluation to verify that assistance reaches poverty-stricken villages and households (Li, Su & Liu, 2016). Favourable policies in taxation and credit support are provided for NGOs to encourage them to participate in the poverty relief campaign. Hence, NGOs are increasingly involved in developing rural areas. By the end of 2015, 62,000 NGOs were engaged in rural development, which accounted for ten percent of the total number of NGOs in China (Ministry of Civil Affairs, 2016).

Understood as having great advantages in poverty relief, tourism development has become a significant strategy for poverty alleviation, within the context of Xi's political agenda. As part of this, in 2014, the *Beautiful Village Project* was implemented by the China Foundation for Poverty Alleviation (CFPA), a government-organised NGO supervised by the State Council Leading Group Office of Poverty Alleviation and Development. *Beautiful Village Project* is a public welfare project of CFPA to achieve poverty alleviation and prosperity of villages through tourism development. This study takes focus with the *Beautiful Village Project*, and the implementation of the project's pilot, which began in 2013 in Fanpai, Guizhou province (see Figure 1). The aim of the project was to develop and promote the location's unique ethnic culture and economic development through an investment of RMB7 million (USD\$1 million).

Fanpai is located on a mountain with an altitude of 1,080 metres and 26 kilometres from the Taijiang County centre. The population is just over 2,000 and remains of Miao ethnicity. According to the village committee statistics, in 2012 the annual net income per capita was only RMB2400 (USD\$362), significantly below the poverty alleviation standard adopted by central government, of RMB3000 (USD\$453) (Xin, 2015).

Figure 1. Map of Fanpai, Guizhou, China.

Source: Compiled by the authors.

#### **4. Method**

Trust is conceived as a complex process (Lewicki & Bunker, 1995), which is difficult to operationalize and measure (Nunkoo & Gursay, 2016; Nunkoo & Smith, 2015). Qualitative

methods are particularly suited to studying trust (Lyon et al., 2015), because they allow the complexities of trust to be explored in detail without the limitation of a standardised and prescriptive model (Saunders et al., 2015). Therefore, participant observation and key informant interviews were used to obtain in-depth knowledge about the events in the process of CFPA's intervention (Baxter & Eyles, 1997). Based on these events, data on the evaluations and perceptions among residents, CFPA and local government were also collected, which can reflect how people generate, maintain, apply and possibly lose trust.

One-week pre-investigation and an 18-day second fieldwork visit were conducted by the second author in August 2016 and July 2017. Snowball sampling was the main method used to recruit respondents. Firstly, a CFPA member was interviewed to gain insights into comments on the project. Then, the CFPA member was asked to recommend other interviewees who were familiar with the tourism development processes of Fanpai village. In this way, the second author established three further respondents. Influenced by emerging themes in these interviews, the researcher sought to conduct further interviews with government officials, members of the village committee and Fumin Tourism Cooperative (FMTC), villagers related to the incidents and employees of Xunmei Hotel Management Company (Xunmei Company). In order to gain broader insights, community members were also approached in public places, and asked if they were interested in participating in the research.

36 semi-structured interviews were conducted based on pre-designed questions and respondents' answers. Interviews lasted from twenty minutes to three hours, with 27 community residents, 5 local government officials, 2 Xunmei Company employees and 2 CFPA

staff. Only two participants were from CFPA, with one spending two years on the project implementation in Fanpai village, the other being the NGO's leader. Both were the people closest to the project (Baxter & Eyles, 1997). Respondents were aged 20 to 67. Culturally it is uncommon for female villagers to participate in public affairs, for this reason there is an uneven gender representation among the respondents; with only six respondents identifying as female, while thirty identified as male. Participants were interviewed to understand their awareness of the *Beautiful Village Project* and CFPA, followed by their perceptions of the other stakeholders.

Mandarin was mainly used in interviews. The interviewer was fluent in Mandarin and able to understand the southwest dialect, although in some cases the interviewer was assisted by a Miao language interpreter when the respondents were not able to speak Mandarin or southwest dialect. Before conducting interviews, the researcher introduced herself to interviewees, explained the research purpose, and stated that the interview conversation would be audio recorded but kept confidential, and that findings would be presented through the use of pseudonyms to protect respondents' privacy. All of which aimed to enhance rigour in the research process (Baxter & Eyles, 1997).

Thematic analysis was undertaken after interview recordings were transcribed verbatim in Chinese characters. Following Braun and Clarke (2006), the second author read the manuscript several times to become familiar with data so that initial codes and themes could be identified. Following this, the first version of the themes was checked by the first author to ensure the correlation, accuracy and consistency. Next, the data was translated into English, and checked by the third author to comply with cohesion, congruence and clarity (Larkin et al., 2007).

Respondents were not a monolithic entity (Saarinen, 2006), but rather a multi-faceted group, possessing different perceptions with regard to the benefits from NGOs in specific place based contexts (Liburd, 2004). Crucially though, because of the remote location, the custom of ethnic endogamy (that is, marrying within a specific social group, caste or ethnic group) still prevails in Fanpai village. This custom heavily influenced trust relations within the village, with almost all interviewed villagers holding similar trust attitudes towards the NGO and government actors. It is these trust attitudes that form the focus of this paper. To better understand the development process of the community trust attitude towards CFPA, the findings are presented in chronological order, whilst a brief timeline of *Beautiful Village Project* is provided below (see Table 1).

Table 1. Timeline of the *Beautiful Village Project*

## **5. Results and discussion**

### ***5.1 Antecedents of trust***

Before CFPA implemented the *Beautiful Village Project* in 2013, many actions, including varied demolition and reconstruction, had been undertaken by local government to promote tourism development. Yet, after many years, tourism in Fanpai village was perceived as still in its infancy, with low levels of tourist numbers and tourist income. In consequence, before the *Beautiful Village Project* had commenced there was already a sense of unease towards government organised tourism planning:

Tens of millions of financial funds were invested to Fanpai village for tourism infrastructure construction. When we got a few funds, we did a little construction. We didn't invest lots of

money at a time to develop the village systematically. This was the problem that we faced.

(Township government official, male, 35 years old)

This county government leader developed this industry, while the next leader developed another. There is no consistent development policy. If Fanpai village was developed consistently, it would not be what it is now. (County government official, male, 33 years old)

Wang et al.'s (2009) work helps to make sense of the non-systematic approach of tourism development in Fanpai; their work suggesting that as the priorities, and consequential promotion standard of Chinese local government officials is economic performance, newly appointed officials are often concerned with accomplishments, especially those that are more prominent or different than their predecessors. This leads to dramatic shifts in policy and project focus, longitudinally. At the same time, as tourism development is centrally determined in China, the village lacked any real power to initiate or manage alternative projects in Fanpai village.

There are a lot of projects assigned by the government, such as the construction of sewage system and firefighting system. When it comes to the projects, I think there is a conflict.

Because the land in our village is very limited, this trench was dug to lay the fire pipeline this year; the same trench will be also dug to lay the sewage pipe next year. Isn't that a conflict?

In the end, it is we, the ordinary residents who suffer. (Villager, male, 25 years old)



I don't know who it was [to do these projects]. Some of those construction teams are from our county and some are from other places, but we don't know who they are. Ordinary residents only participated in the construction work. (Villager, male, 67 years old)

Such powerlessness may be explained through both the low hierarchical position of residents in China's tourism planning processes and the uneven political attention received by authorities over the years. The latter being particularly pertinent here, because the low socio-economic positioning of village residents ensured that Fanpai had regularly served as a government priority (Zhe & Chen, 2011). Ironically, it was this government prioritising, and the resulting irregular investment over a number of years, that served as a significant barrier in the sustainable development of Fanpai.

The lack of power held by residents and the lack of systematic planning processes were crucial in influencing the antecedent trust held towards tourism development prior to the commencement of the *Beautiful Village Project*. Many villagers used the idiom - 'all talk and no action (干打雷不下雨)' to describe the development of tourism in Fanpai village. The performance of government in tourism influences political trust, leading to an ability-based trust and sincerity-based trust (Nunkoo & Gursoy, 2017). The former referring to trust in a party's skills, competencies and expertise within some specific domain; the latter corresponding to the trust in benevolence, signified through a move beyond egocentric profit motives (Chen & Chen, 2004; Mayer et al., 1995). As illustrated through the above respondent exerts, an ability-based mistrust circulated before the project had even begun due to inadequate professional and systematic tourism planning in the years leading up to

the *Beautiful Village Project*. Further influencing an initial ability-based mistrust, alongside a reduction in the sincerity-based trust, because the local tourism development strategy had changed frequently as key local officials were replaced.

## ***5.2 Governance structures of (mis)trust***

The process through which Fanpai was investigated and selected as a pilot village further worked to influence perceptions of the CFPA, before the commencement of the *Beautiful Village Project*. Officials from the Poverty Alleviation and Development Office (PADO) of local government usually accompanied the CFPA and provided key information about the village, ensuring a lack of distinction between local government and the CFPA – as noted by a key member of the CFPA:

Though we cannot say that PADOs at every level are our ‘parents’, but at least they are our ‘elders’. That is, if we have some difficulties in the communication with other departments, we can ask them to coordinate. It can be said that they act as a local connect person, and are responsible for providing us with some resources. (CFPA member, male, 24 years old)

Residents were not always aware of the governmental structures of tourism development, whilst there was limited understanding of what a government organised NGO was and how they differed to that of local government. As a result, CFPA staff were often mistaken as government officials in the early stage of project implementation, and the pre-existing image of local government as mistrusting, in consequence, was transferred to CFPA. This ensured not only that a pre-existing ambivalence towards tourism development circulated prior to the

implementation of the *Beautiful Village Project*, but also that this ambivalence was directly associated with the CFPA – despite this NGO never having been involved with project implementation in this village. As a villager shared, ‘When CFPA came and claimed to donate money and help us, I thought it was the government who cheated for money again.’

Aware of the circulation of mistrust, once the project commenced CFPA aimed to achieve better autonomous development through community participation. In response, in May 2014, RMB0.1 million (USD\$15,080) was donated for a tourism cooperative registration, consisting of eight council board members, four supervisory board members and nine ordinary representatives. Among the 21 members, 20 were local residents, whilst one was from CFPA. In practice, the cooperative was open to every household with all residents free to join, and year-end bonuses were promised to members once FMTC received tourism revenue. Initially the community focused approach of the committee was received positively. Yet, despite a perceived initial focus on community members, during the project, CFPA paid greatest attention to engineering construction and the potential of a few ‘local capable men’:

As for the contacts with local villagers, it was what we were trying to avoid. That is, we did not want to talk with villagers face to face. We had found some local capable men, like R09-WDX [a member of FMTC council board and once a member of the village committee]. Through him, our intention was conveyed to villagers; accordingly, he gave us feedback from the villagers.... Before I came to the village, my leader told me not to interact directly with the villagers. If we try to understand every villager’s opinion, our project cannot be completed.

(CFPA member, male, 24 years old)

They [CFPA staff and R09-WDX] didn't tell us anything about the construction. They didn't say anything. How did we know? (Villager, male, 62 years old)

Whilst upon first appearance the CFPA was highly governed and structured, in practice relationships were much more informal and flexible. This structural dichotomy can be explained through the Chinese concept of 'guanxi'. As noted by Zhao and Timothy (2015), in China informal and visible personal networks, known as guanxi, may weaken formal network mechanisms. Guanxi has significant implications for community tourism projects, specifically in relation to ethnic minorities (such as the Miao community of Fanpai), who hold limited control over tourism resources and development (Zhao & Timothy, 2015). With cultural, historical origins in Confucianism, guanxi forms as the foundation for social interaction in the Chinese context, by which stakeholders are able to negotiate and network with others (Wang, 2013). Rather than focusing on social networks and hierarchical positions, as is dominant within Western social networks, guanxi prioritises the content and process of dyadic relationships. Here, it is one's personal guanxi that forms as central in generating organisational connections, accessing resources and enhancing performance (*ibid.*). Through this process, an elite group may be formed, consisting of only a few residents – such as Fanpai's 'local capable men', who were perceived to possess 'guanxi'.

By way of example, R09-WDX was understood to embody guanxi in response to his social background and status. R09-WDX's father had previously held leadership positions in Fanpai, suggesting the family held a certain social standing within the village. Moreover, with over a decade of experience working in the urban cities of Guangzhou and Shanghai, R09-WDX

would often assist other villagers seeking employment in these cities – allowing R09-WDX to develop a patron-client guanxi (Scott, 1972a, 1972b; Zhang, Ding & Bao, 2009). All of which point to the social, cultural and economic capital possessed by R09-WDX. Therefore, upon returning to Fanpai, R09-WDX became the secretary of the village party branch – a kind of political elite, and was regarded by CFPA as the agent of the state power machine, possessing strong influence and mobilization power in the village due to his social network. As an external organisation, this was particularly important for CFPA because the Chinese are accustomed to classifying guanxi into ‘family members’, ‘acquaintances’ and ‘outsiders’ (Hwang, 2006). ‘In rural society, trust derives from familiarity’ (Fei, 1992, p.43). The closer the guanxi between two parties, the greater their mutual trust (Yang, 2009). What resulted in the prioritisation of guanxi was the exclusion of most community members. Whilst the exclusion of community members is of course not unique to Chinese society, the Chinese context has been found to be more focused on the personal and dyadic relations in professional settings, such as the one here outlined – resulting in particular exclusion processes determined through guanxi (Zhao & Timothy, 2015).

This approach ensured very specific village committee members became crucial points of liaison, allowing the CFPA to move further away from community engagement. Thus, rather than the group working to break down any initial mistrust, the performance of guanxi through the group only served to heighten distinctions between the CFPA and residents. In response, over time fewer villagers were willing to participate in the tourism cooperative:

[Sigh]. There was no dividend in these years, so how to say, the community residents hold a distrustful attitude towards us.... Now it's like an empty shelf. Only R09-WDX and I are busy, which makes me feel quite bad. (CFPA member, male, 24 years old)

Moreover, despite an initial promise of revenue, members did not receive any economic return for their involvement in the cooperative. Failure to again deliver on initial objectives served to further heighten the mistrust held by residents towards CFPA – ultimately leading many to adopt a 'wait and see' attitude towards the project:

I am a member of the cooperative. However, it seems that there is no hope, because there is no income. Let's see what will happen. But now it is losing money. (Board member, male, 50 years old)

In my opinion, even though CFPA came and helped to develop the village, few things will be changed. This is my personal idea. They [CFPA] have no idea of the development. They just built these houses, but how do we develop? (Villager, male, 38 years old)

It is useful to put forth a diagram to illustrate the trust relationship among stakeholders (see Figure 2). Contrast to the western pattern – all members in an organization are equivalent, Chinese social structure is like 'the concentric circles formed when a stone is thrown into a lake' (Fei, 1992, p. 63). As indicated through the diagram, the trust of Chinese people is largely determined by the closeness of guanxi, with residents placed at the centre of the diagram holding the highest levels of trust for one another, and those furthest away experiencing the least trust from local residents. Local government acts as a bridge between the NGO and residents. In the

context of this research, the trust linkage between the NGO and residents was problematic because of the mistrust held towards the local government intermediary. This mistrust between residents and local government intermediary was transferred to the NGO, because both the local government and NGO were understood to be in the same category – ‘outsiders’. This was further accentuated within this Chinese context through *guanxi*, whereby the *guanxi* the NGO’s held towards the local government intermediary, ensured that the objectives of the local government intermediary were prioritised, over that of the residents. Thus, further asserting the mistrust held by residents towards the NGO and local government.

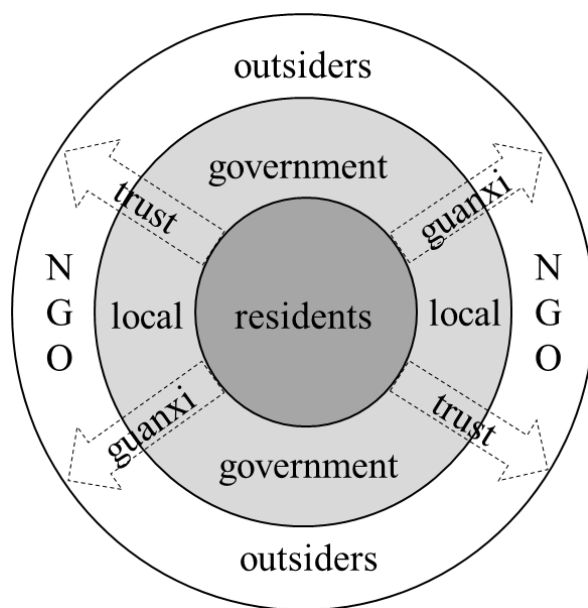


Figure 2. The trust space of stakeholders.

### ***5.3 Power/Knowledge/Trust***

Although residents possessed little direct sources of information about CFPA prior to the NGOs involvement in the village, during project implementation information came to light. Specifically, a ‘scandal of public funds misappropriation’ became public in 2016, further

aggravating residents' attitude towards CFPA. Whilst not publicly known until 2016, the scandal took place at the beginning of the project, in 2013, when RMB40,000 (USD\$6,070) was disbursed from central government to Fanpai villagers, for forest conservation. As there was no public account in the initial stages of the project, the money was transferred to the private account of the secretary R09-WDX. After some time, the money was used by R09-WDX for personal affairs:

Well, saying busy is an excuse. Actually, I was concurrently doing some engineering and contracting projects of my own. I thought maybe I could use the money in advance, and then I would repay it. (Board member, male, 35 years old)

In May 2015, the village's public account was created, allowing R09-WDX to deposit the money.

R09-WDX had 'eaten' the money, but he returned it later. Therefore, the funds were divided equally among the villagers, with RMB100 per household. (Villager, male, 47 years old)

Nevertheless, R09-WDX was impeached in March 2016 and then removed from the village committee. Crucially though, R09-WDX continued to serve as a member of FMTC council board, whilst this encounter did not influence R09-WDX's relationship with the CFPA:

The money is actually on R09-WDX's private account for a period of time, just a little longer, but he didn't embezzle the public funds. There must be someone secretly make mischief.

(CFPA member, male, 24 years old)



Again the concept of guanxi can be drawn on to explain why the CFPA felt it was suitable to deposit the funds into a private account and for not holding R09-WDX accountable, despite it being against formalised legal processes. Reflecting a perceived unreliability of institutional structures in China, guanxi is often drawn on as an alternative process. The process of guanxi, thus, often subverts the bureaucratic hierarchy of the authoritarian state (Zhao & Timothy, 2015). The depositing of finances into a personal account was perceived as acceptable by the CFPA because the project was in a transition stage in which administrative gaps existed. Within this context, guanxi, was viewed by CFPA as a more appropriate process of facilitation to that of the formalised system. The trust embedded within guanxi performances was understood to be more stable and reliable to the trust which circulates in Chinese society (Chen & Chen, 2004). Whilst the attachment and sense of obligation that had developed between the CFPA and R09-WDX ensured that the ‘scandal’ had limited effect on the relationship between these two parties, it did, however, serve to heighten the mistrust residents held towards both R09-WDX and CFPA – as was evident later in the lack of trust that was shown by residents in the payment of funds for the construction of a wooden pavilion.

The wooden pavilion was built on the top of a mountain providing a sightseeing platform for tourists in 2016. After construction, CFPA needed to pay the carpentry employees. According to CFPA financial system requirements, a work completion and acceptance report required at least three signatures of the village committee or FMTC council board members to prove project completion. The first signed report was ‘lost’ by the CFPA staff; therefore, a supplementary signature was required. R09-WDX asked three board members who were

residents of Fanpai to sign, but was refused. For R09-WDX, the three board members were ungrateful and deliberately created difficulties for CFPA staff:

I said, 'They [CFPA] are very kind to donate money and help us develop, but you [the other three board members] deliberately make things more difficult for them.' [Sigh] It makes me so angry. (Board member, male, 35 years old)

Yet, the FMTC board understood the situation differently:

**Board Member:** He [CFPA staff member] told us on the phone that it was lost, without face to face.

**Interviewer:** Are there any differences between 'on the phone' and 'face to face'?

**Board Member:** We must let him come and sign a declaration face to face, saying 'the former report is lost and this is a supplementary one'. If he signs, then we sign. We are afraid that they [CFPA staff and R09-WDX] can 'eat' twice, that is, they have appropriated the reimbursement through the first report without telling us, and then they want to get the money again through the second report. CFPA gives the money for the development of our village, not for them to do illegal things. (Board member, male, 62 years old)

Knowledge is understood to be intimately connected to understandings of trust and power, within the trust in tourism literature. Knowledge, however, is generally understood in quite simplistic terms within this scholarship, where increased knowledge is thought to increase trust, while poor knowledge is understood to cause a lack of trust (Nunkoo, 2015; Nunkoo, Ribeiro,

Sunnassee & Gurso, 2018). Here, however, committee members were able to draw on 'knowledge' accumulated through prior encounters with R09-WDX and the CFPA to determine that this 'elite' planning group should not be trusted to administer funding. Knowledge of the elite group importantly here subjectively constructed by prior encounters of mistrust, rather than any official evidence that R09-WDX sought to 'eat twice'. Crucial in this encounter is the relationship between trust, knowledge and power – where the three community residents/board members, who possessed minimal power in contrast to the CFPA, were able to draw on knowledge gained through the earlier 'scandal of misappropriation of funds' to enact power against R09-WDX and the CFPA, through their refusal to sign the acceptance report. Recognising that trust normally follows lines of social power (Shapin, 2010), this shift in power dynamics was an important moment of reconfiguring in the social relations between the CFPA and residents. These findings align with Foucault's (1978) conceptualisation of knowledge, whereby the accumulation of certain knowledge renders power, offering opportunity for different ways of acting, which work to reformulate conventional hierarchical structures.

## **6. Conclusion**

The success of tourism development projects are not the result of rational decision making processes. Rather, they are determined through complex political, cultural and social factors that circulate in spatially specific ways. Although there is an expanding body of work on trust in tourism, it has mostly conceptualised trust as psychological. Whilst this work is crucial to understandings of trust, findings presented in this work are largely concerned with identifying the rational, prescriptive and essentialised decision making processes that enable trust to unfold

between stakeholders; rendering limited attention to the ways trust is relational, spatial and structural. This study thus argued that geographical approaches to trust are imperative in extending understandings concerning how trust is inscribed through space, through situated tourism development projects. To illustrate this argument a case study from China's Guizhou province was utilised, identifying the ways China's structures of governance, social hierarchies and guanxi determine trust relations.

Within the Chinese authoritarian context, NGOs are positioned in such a way that inhibits their ability to undertake projects independently of government, ensuring that political influence is heavily present across all forms of tourism development – even small scale community projects. Western conceptualisations dominate the understanding of NGOs within the context of trust in tourism research – whereby NGOs are broadly considered to be a trustworthy sector for providing involvement and mutual aid to the beneficiary community. Such Western conceptualisation leads to ignorance regarding the specificities of NGOs as they operate through modes of governance, in the Chinese context. For this reason, attending to the antecedents of mistrust is central to understanding how structural dimensions of governance in relation to NGOs and tourism development may pre-exist, and affect the community trust attitude towards NGOs, even if those organisations have held no previous relation with a destination.

Further, illustrating the role of space to understandings of trust in tourism, the concept of guanxi was examined. Guanxi was shown to be central in understanding how trust transcends formalised governance structures within China – a process based on forms of social, cultural

and economic capital – which ultimately generates distance between NGOs and the community, marginalising residents from tourism development processes.

Knowledge, power and trust have long been understood to be intimately connected. Yet, within trust in tourism literature the relationship between knowledge and trust has been conceived as a unidirectional causal relationship – in its suggestion that higher levels of knowledge render higher levels of trust. This is despite in-depth engagement with Foucault's (1978) work within this body of literature, which recognises knowledge as a social construction, consistently open to reformulations, dependent upon specificities of place. In line with Foucault's ideas, increased knowledge of a stakeholder's work practices may also lead to increased mistrust. As projects develop, this increased knowledge may assist in troubling 'traditional' social hierarchies that have been built through governance structures and *guanxi*, restructuring power dynamics – if only momentarily. Understanding of the ways power is attained by residents over time, through knowledge accumulation, points to the potentials of longer term projects in generating community engagement. Although within the Chinese context, such an approach stands in distinct contrast to the current established approach concerned with the individualised accomplishments of political leaders.

Prioritisation of the psychological within tourism scholarship overlooks the complexity of work currently taking place across the social sciences. Without such incorporation, trust in tourism research not only risks remaining siloed in its limited engagement with broader debates but also inhibits potentially useful contributions to understandings of trust in tourism development. Future trust in tourism research needs to attend to the specificities of space to

understanding the culturally specific ways tourism development unfolds beyond western contexts.

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