

Particularities of the Ecotourism in China

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Abstract

The protected areas represent – according to the opinion of many specialists – the main component of national and international strategies concerning the preservation/protection sustained by the governments and specialized organisms. As a result of the expansion of this country, in China many forms of tourism begin to be practiced, some of them modern such as extreme sports and even ecotourism which means that the Chinese authorities understood the importance of preserving the tourism resources of which the future generations will benefit, especially if the touristic fluxes to China will intensify. On the other hand, the population of China has learnt that they can take advantages from practicing the ecotourism as a part of the incomes earned go to the local economy, leading to its development. In the last years China created a complex national network of the natural reservations with a rational distribution and a solid function.

Keywords: protected areas, biodiversity, ecotourism;

J.E.L. Classification: O13, Q26

1. Introduction

The remarkable importance which nature, the environment has on life and human existence is reflected in the preoccupation to its preservation.

The system of protected areas covers approximately 12% from the land territory and offers the guarantee of a future.

The preservation objective materialized along time in the **constitution of protected areas** and creation of systems, first national and then international, of protected areas, in the improvement of the administration methods of this area, in the dissemination of the experience concerning their organization and administration.

The protected areas represent the answer of the modern societies to the more and more increased process of deterioration of environment, of species disappearance; exaggerate exploitation of various categories of resources, especially of the ones that cannot be regenerated and with impact on the life quality and society's perspectives.

The protected areas because of their natural value and the low level of human interventions on their territory are the best examples and patterns for the natural and semi natural ecological systems.

We need to add that inside these oases of ecological balance – the protected areas - there are lacks because of trespassing the rules, intensive exploitation of some resources, the encouragement for apparently inoffensive activities such as tourism etc.

The administration of the protected areas must be reported to the diversity of their activities from inside and outside which need to be approached in a unitary way and at the same time take into account the complexity of the integrated environment and the generated impact. From this perspective, the modern management of protected areas proposes a complete vision which will take into consideration the interdependences with the other components of the natural and economic-social frame assuring the efficiency of the benefic effects of their function. In other words it is about the application of the principles for a complete development at the level of protected areas.

2. The importance of tourism for China

In China the wild life is rare and close to disappearance and also its habitats are under the protection of the government, being well protected and preserve in various protected areas. The fast economic development and the increase of the population have led to an excessive consumption of plant resources and this fact increased the species close to disappearance.

The Chinese territory is known for its extremely diversifies relief which is divided in two different parts respective in West there are hills, plateaus and huge mountains (here, in Tibet, there is the highest peak in the world – Everest – 8.849 m), separated from the precipices and deep valleys and in the East there is a coast region with wide plains.

China, led by communists, is heading more and more to a free market economy. There have been created economic areas with a special statute such as Shanghai, and the concept of private property is reaching a sense.

This country owns a vast touristic potential, one of the best examples being the Great Chinese Wall which is the longest construction in the world and the only edifice built by man who can be seen from cosmos. We also add the Yun'gang grottos with more than 50 000 statues made for Buddha, the Metropolis Shanghai, and Wudang Mountain with old Taoist edifices for more than 500 years, the Hong Kong-one of the economic and urbanism „miracles” of the world (Matei et al, 2001).

The best proof of the value of touristic attractions is the ascendant evolution of China in the classification of the first touristic destinations of the world, increasing each year with ten places – in 2009 it was on the fourth place in the world with 50.9 million tourists. Concerning the incomes from international tourism, China is placed on the fifth place in the world with 39.7 billion dollars. Also, from the first countries that spend most at an international level for tourism, China is placed again on the fourth seat in 2009, with 43.7 billion dollars, meaning the country had an increased level of economic development which permits the population to leave the country for tourism purposes.

3. Specific elements of the natural protected areas from China

In China, the natural areas include 85 per cent from the natural terrestrial ecological system, most of them being natural relicts, 85 per cent from the wild population (in particular giant panda, the comb ibis, the Asian elephant, the Chinese alligator), over 65 per cent from the communities of superior plants (such as cycadels).

Around 4000-5000 superior plants have been close to disappearance or threaten to disappear, representing 15-20 per cent from the total number from China, more than the average at an international level.

The first natural reservation from China is Dinghu Mountain from Zhaoqing, province Guangdong, which was founded in 1956. The natural reservation Sanjiangyuan is the largest (316 000 km²), with the biggest altitude (over 4000 m) and with the richest biodiversity. The reservation is situated inside the plateau Qinghai-Tibet, at the source of the rivers Yangtzi, Yellow and Lancang.

A part of the natural reservations are in special areas of protection the biodiversity with international importance. The province Yunnan has 152 natural reservations which cover a surface of 2.8 million ha. Therefore, **Yunnan is the province with the most natural reservations from China**. 22 natural reservations from which Wolong and Jiuzhai Valley from Sichuan province, Changbai Mountains from Jilin, Dinghu Mountain from Guangdong, Baishui river from Gansu and others have been included on the UNESCO list of natural reservations of the biosphere with international importance.

China has a great variety and a great number of humid areas. All categories of humid areas are distributed in the country except the North area. The surface of the 28 types of humid areas (each bigger than 100 ha) is of 38.48 million ha (excluding Hong Kong, Macao and Taiwan), or 4 per cent from the terrestrial surface. From these humid areas, the natural ones totals 36.2 million ha including 5.94 million ha coast humid areas, 8.2 million ha river-humid areas, 8.35 million ha lakes-humid areas and 13.7 million ha marsh-humid areas.

The species presented in the humid areas are extremely varied. The density of the plant species from the humid areas is of 0.0056 species/km², over Brazil who has the richest flora.

From the total surface covered by the natural reservations, the terrestrial surface represents 145.88 million ha and the marine one 6 million ha. The percentage of the terrestrial surface refers to the proportion between the natural reservations and the terrestrial surface.

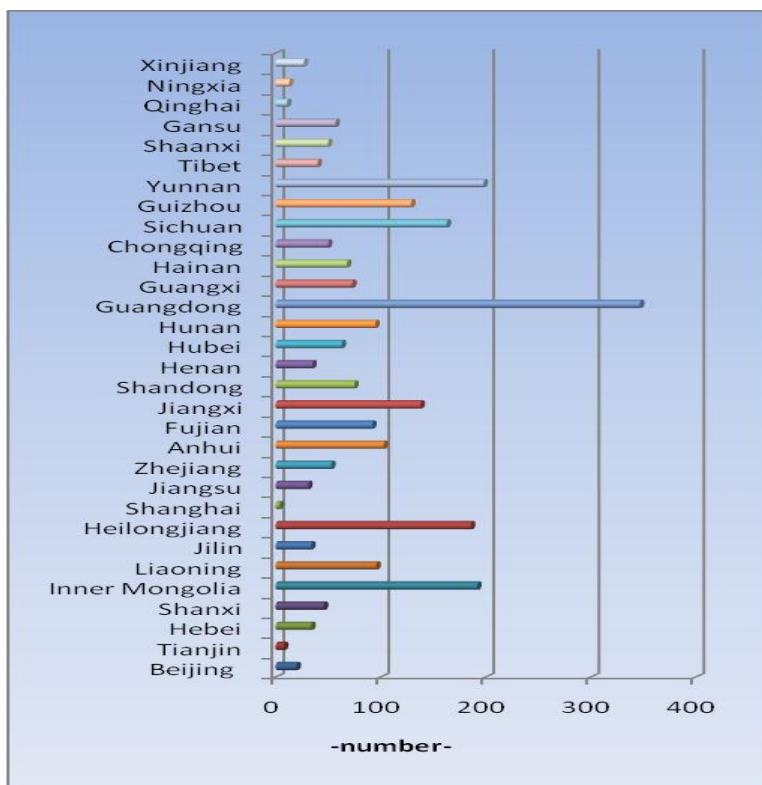


Figure 1. The numerical distribution of natural protected areas from China

The diversity of the ecological environment from China created rich resources for a wild life. The superior plants have a number of 30 000 species. Hundreds of rare wild animals and close to disappearance and over 17000 plants are unique in China, such as giant panda, comb ibis, the monkey with snub-nose, tiger from south of China, Chinese alligator, Chinese crock-lizard etc.. 31 Panda babies were born in captivity from which 25 survived. The tiger from north-east is more present to the natural activities, expanding in this way his habitat. The reintroduction of comb ibis, wild horse, Chinese alligator and also other species close to disappearance has progressed continuously.

There were founded 19 new reservations at a national level which has increased the number of natural reservations of the country with 2531 with a total surface of 93.65 million ha, which represents 12 per cent from the total number of natural national reservations and 61.7 per cent from the total surface occupied by them. There are 28 natural reservations on the list of Biosphere Reservations (UNESCO) and 33 from the natural reservations are on the List of Humid Areas of International Importance (Ramsar). 10 reservations belong to the natural world patrimony.

Table 1 – Categories of natural reservation from China

| Category | Number | | Surface | |
|---|-------------|------------|-----------------------------|------------|
| | Total | % | Total surface (10 000) (ha) | % |
| Natural ecosystems | 1717 | 67,84 | 10529,18 | 69,32 |
| Forestry ecosystems | 1314 | 51,92 | 3372,76 | 22,21 |
| The meadows and pasture lands ecosystems | 45 | 1,78 | 316,05 | 2,08 |
| The desert ecosystems | 29 | 1,15 | 4027,45 | 26,52 |
| The interiors of humid areas and water areas ecosystems | 261 | 10,31 | 2713,02 | 17,86 |
| Coast and marine ecosystems | 68 | 2,69 | 99,91 | 0,66 |
| Wild biological species | 683 | 26,99 | 4483,38 | 29,52 |
| Wild animals reservations | 523 | 20,66 | 4220,86 | 27,79 |
| Wild plant reservations | 160 | 6,32 | 262,52 | 1,73 |
| Natural relicts | 131 | 5,18 | 175,62 | 1,16 |
| Geological relicts | 99 | 3,91 | 123,04 | 0,81 |
| Old creatures' relicts | 32 | 1,26 | 52,58 | 0,35 |
| Total | 2531 | 100 | 15188,18 | 100 |

Source: Report on the State of the Environment in China, Ministry for the Environment Protection of Popular Republic of China, 2007;

In order to sustain the administration of the natural reservations, the resort ministry made an evaluation concerning the management of 12 natural reservations from 10 reference points such as the organization method, personnel, administration etc. As a result of this study, from the 12 reservations 4 were given „excellent” marks, 6 were „well” and two were „average”.

China increased the surface of the natural marine reservations and increased also the number of the protected species, these improving the protection of many ecological systems and in danger species. In the last period the Chinese government increased the survey of natural marine reservations and the fight against the destruction of coral Recife and mangroves.

Another major preoccupation of China for protecting the in danger species was **the construction of the biggest reservation of panda bears in the world**. This started in a major habitat of this specie from Sichuan province, from south-west of China. The project is making efforts to increase the in danger population. Situated in Gengda city from the Natural reservation **Wolong**, the base of 1 km² has approximately 200 panda bears. Outside the feeding and reproduction area, the base includes also a surface of 19 400 m² for exterior activities according to the plan. Because of the improved technologies, the number of panda bears kept in captivity increased to 130 from 10, but the actual facilities are not sufficient for reproduction.

The panda bear, an animal inactive sexually is one of the species in danger from the world because of the lack of habitat. China has 239 panda bears in captivity. Approximately 1590 wild pandas live in China, especially in Sichuan, Gansu and Shaanxi provinces.

The population of a rare species of monkeys from a reservation situated in the south-west of China tripled in the last 26 years. **The population of the snub-nosed monkeys from Yunnan increased** from a number of 500 in 1983, to approximately 1300 in present because of the ecological period of this area and the poaching prohibition. Over 60 per cent from the snub-nosed monkeys from Yunnan live in the Baima Snow Mountain Reservation and it is on the list of protected species of the country. In present, the monkeys from Yunnan have a population of approximately 2000 species.

4. Methods of practicing the ecotourism in China

Recently, Destination Australia Market Alliance (DAMA) elaborated a study on the ecotourism market from different countries of the world, focusing on the behaviour and motivations of the tourists.

An important number of Chinese eco-tourists declared that in their last vacation they tried to develop activities such as: watching the wild life in its natural environment (79 per cent); visiting the ecological areas (68 per cent); walking in natural environment and unpopulated rural areas (60 per cent).

Approximately half of the Chinese eco-tourists planned, sometimes, a vacation based on natural activities (48 per cent).

Table 2 – The demographic profile of the Chinese eco-tourists

| Demographical elements | Characteristics (proportions) |
|---|--|
| Age | Most Chinese eco-tourists are between 25 and 34 years old to which it's added a percentage of 22% with ages between 45 and 54 years old. |
| Sex | The Chinese eco-tourists register equal proportions concerning the sex, respective 48% are men and 52% are women. |
| Children under 18 years being under custody | Most Chinese eco-tourists (68%) don't have children under 18 in custody; 29% from them have just one child. |
| Income/house | Most Chinese eco-tourists (67%) have a monthly income per house between 633-1896 American dollars. |
| Professional status | 74% from the Chinese eco-tourists work full-time (30 or more hours per week). |
| Educational level | Most Chinese eco-tourists graduated at least two or three years of college (34%), a university or more (36%). |
| Size of travelling group | In China, the size of the travelling group divided in: „no one else” – „five or more”. Compared to other countries, in a high proportion the Chinese travel in groups of five persons or more (29%). |
| Marital status | The Chinese eco-tourists are married/live as a married couple/live with the partner (63%). |

Source: The Chinese Ecotourism Market, Tourism Queensland

Therefore, the characteristics of the Chinese eco-tourists (table 2) includes them in the profile of the international eco-tourist, such as, according to their age there is a big

proportion between 25 and 34 years old, they have approximately equal percentages concerning the sex and a high level of education.

Concerning the **accommodation method**, most Chinese eco-tourists, in their last vacation, used hotels of luxury, respective hotels of 4-5 stars (39 per cent) and 36 per cent used hotels of 2-3 stars. A smaller percentage of Chinese eco-tourists stayed in all inclusive units (7 per cent); visitor houses/farms/cabanas – 5 per cent; apartments/individual villas – 5 per cent; tents – 1 per cent etc.

The Chinese eco-tourists tend to reserve all components of a trip before leaving in vacation. Approximately 46% planned all flights/other transportation means; all accommodation methods, a part of the alimentation services and also the touristic circuits/supplementary trips before living their houses.

From all the television programs watched by the Chinese eco-tourists, „The relaxation and trip programs” has the third place with 62 per cent, after „The International News” (72 per cent) and „National News” (71 per cent). Among the magazines read by the Chinese eco-tourists the trip magazines have the highest proportion, more than half, respective 57 per cent.

The eco-touristic destination chosen depends in a great measure on the report between quality and price (86 per cent), then on „how welcome is the Chinese people in the country of destination” (82 per cent) and finally, the third place is represented by „the recommendations made by the family members or friends who’s been there” in a proportion of 79 per cent.

Therefore, the **key factors taken into consideration when choosing the destination** are the following: the report between quality and price – 86 per cent; how welcome is the Chinese people – 82 per cent; recommendations from family and friends who’s been there – 79 per cent; the infrastructure standard existing in the touristic destination – 78 per cent; economic and political stability – 75 per cent; easy visa to obtain – 74 per cent; needs of travelling – 73 per cent; somewhere totally different than China – 73 per cent; number of famous places that can be visited during a determined period of time – 71 per cent; terrorism threat – 70 per cent.

The activities according to which the eco-touristic trip is planned focus on the following aspects:

- Tasting the specific local culinary preparations and drinks – 75 per cent;
- Buying the products from the local market – 73 per cent;
- Ecological activities in nature/wild – 69 per cent;
- Walks on the beach/solar baths – 60 per cent;
- Watching the wild life in its natural environment – 55 per cent;
- knowing the animals/animals’ farms/visit the zoological gardens – 50 per cent;
- Buying products that represent the local brand – 50 per cent;
- Swimming/surfing – 49 per cent;
- Visiting the botanic gardens/watch the flower species – 47 per cent;
- Taking pictures – 46 per cent.

It can be observed that the ecological culinary preparations and local drinks are more wanted by the Chinese eco-tourists than the walks in the nature.

5. Conclusions

The governmental plans must accord to the ecotourism a great priority in the developed countries especially, where the local population participates in an efficient way to touristic activities. In general the population who live close to the protected rural areas is characterized by low incomes and small economical options. The ecotourism can represent, in this way, a reliable economic alternative for these populations which makes that the inhabitants of these regions to become the guardians and active preservers of the natural areas, especially as their wealth depends on the preservation of the natural qualities and the environment. Therefore it is necessary that the local population to have practical information's concerning the natural characteristics of the area (landscape, flora, fauna), which will transform them into real guides. They can also participate directly to economic activities of exploitation of hotels, restaurants and providing some services.

O great number of visited places by tourists interested in ecological tourism is part of the fragile ecosystems which cannot support to be perturbed. In many cases the tourism creates damages to flora and wild fauna from the protected areas. In most cases the tourism causes damages to wild flora and fauna from the protected areas.

The local population risks believing that the protected areas were created for the strangers and not in for local interest. Also, most of the important areas for the nature preservation present a reduced interest for the tourists which determine the responsible authorities to neglect them as they are not obtaining any profit.

Because the previsions of the International Organization of Tourism show that in 2020 China will become the first touristic destination of the world with 130 million arrivals, more than France, it is obvious that the segment of eco-tourists will have an important percentage of foreign tourists and also internal tourists because practicing the ecological tourism, respective the sustainable one, represents the future in the tourism industry; therefore, in a short period the touristic resources – „prime material” of tourism will disappear because of the lack of preservation and protection actions such as the ecological ones.

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