

# Meeting needs equals enhancing satisfaction?

## Case study of cableway and lift riding in World Heritage Site Wulingyuan, China

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**Abstract** – Meeting the needs of tourists to satisfy tourists is the policy basis for many managers of world heritage sites in China. The paper, based on the case study of lift riding in world heritage site Wulingyuan China, challenge the policy. With tourist survey and online interview methods, the authors argue that lift do meet part of tourists' needs, but it do not enhance the satisfaction level as the managers supposed, the assertion "meet the needs of tourists, thus enhancing their satisfaction" is not built on solid ground, and catering to the needs of tourists is at least not a valid reason for tourism developments in heritage sites. The results of this study coincide with the Motivation-Hygiene Theory. Some factors may not give positive satisfaction, but dissatisfaction results from their absence, such as good service quality and management skills. The improvement of services and management skills may eliminate dissatisfaction, but cannot enhance tourist satisfaction. They are called hygiene factors. Those factors that can provide positive satisfaction are called motivators. Cableway and lift act as motivators that can induce more satisfaction if properly operated.

**Keywords** – Meeting needs, tourist satisfaction, motivation-hygiene theory

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### 1 INTRODUCTION

There are many issues in the management of heritage tourism that are deemed to be straightforward in western countries but become very

complicated and controversial in the Chinese context. Construction of cableways within heritage sites is one of them. In Mainland China, the construction of cableways and other modern means of transport into World Heritage sites is a highly controversial issue.

Most supporters are stakeholders and interest groups of tourism development, who tend to view the issue from a market perspective and think that cableways have many advantages over roads or trails. Cableways are more adaptive to the topographic conditions and less affected by weather; they require less space to build, therefore they have less negative impact on local topography and natural environment. With greater grade ability, they shorten distance between two ends and save time for the tourists. They do not

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discharge emission of "Three Wastes" (waste water, waste gas and solid wastes) and do not cause noise pollution; thereafter they meet the need for protecting the environment and ecology of the place. They are safe and reliable; easy to maintain with automated operation. They need less fund for infrastructure construction and less expensive to run, so better financial returns are generated. They consume less energy and therefore achieve greater energy conservation. Besides, they hold the idea that cableways, as a manifestation of human achievement and scenery upgrade, can be fully developed under proper arrangement and in accordance with principles of landscape ecology in order to boost tourism development (Jiang, 2000) Fang and Dong, 2001).

Meanwhile, tourist cableways can effectively meet tourists' needs and enhance their satisfaction by increasing carrying ability and thus saving their time on the way. They may become a tourist attraction themselves; with enlarged environment capacity and improved construction on the site, more tourists will be attracted and thus more revenue will be generated which in turn accumulates funds for developing new tourist resorts and new cableways. Consequently, a virtuous cycle of tourist development will be achieved. Besides, cableways can serve to transport people and goods swiftly in case of an emergency. Therefore, cableways should be recognized for their merits in promoting the development of mountainous scenic spots and be employed as an effective means in the sustainable development of such spots. (Xie, 2000)

However, the opponents of building tourist cableways are mostly heritage experts and heritage management departments. For example, Renzhi HOU (2000) and other consultants for the State Cultural Relics Bureau, who commented on the cableways in Tai Mountain, consider a cableway built in 1980, during the construction of which a small but integral part of the mountain was blasted away, to be the most serious damage to the authenticity and integrity of the topography of

the mountain whose natural beauty was destroyed significantly, thus caused visual pollution to tourists. Besides, a high concentration of tourists on top of the mountain has led to such consequences as over-commercialization, over-urbanization and environment degradation of that area. Cableways also deprive the tourists of the pleasure of climbing and conquering the mountain. With shorter average time each tourist spent in Tai'an where Tai Mountain is located, tourist revenue thus becomes less. The beneficiaries are the cableway operators only. During the construction process, they failed to follow proper procedures by acting first and reporting afterwards, thus violated relevant rules and regulations.

Ninggao Xie (2000), another expert for the Ministry of Construction (the authority in charge of scenic areas and World Heritage Sites), maintains that sightseeing cableways cause irreversible damage to the topography, vegetation, ecology and natural beauty of scenic spots. World Heritage Sites in particular are among serious victims. Besides, visitors who choose to use cableways to get to the top may forget the intrinsic value of mountain climbing, thus undermining the reputation of this renowned mountain. He also insists that cableways and other tourist facilities cause irretrievable damage to World Heritage Sites and that they should be built somewhere outside the resorts. He firmly believes that tourists' needs should not be blindly met at the expense of heritage itself. (Xie, 2000)

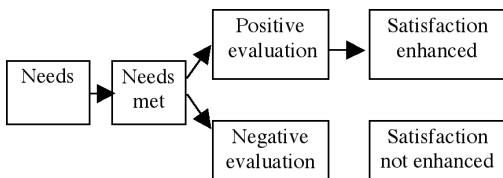
Though heritage experts and the mass media strongly protest against the building of tourist cableways, in many cases, out of their conscience and morality, yet they can hardly provide any empirical studies or concrete evidence to prove the negative effects of these projects. Due to the lack of practical research and related legislation over this particular issue, such projects have been and are still being launched one after another in the country's leading World Natural and Cultural Heritage sites, such as Taishan, Huangshan Emei Shan and Wudang Shan and so forth, among which the World Natural Heritage Wul-

Wulingyuan is one of the most typical cases. Since 1992, when Wulingyuan was listed as a World Natural Heritage, the local government has successively built two cableways, one railway and one elevator for sightseeing. Despite the controversy and criticism caused by the construction of these facilities, the local government persists to initiate another cableway construction on the ground of "meeting tourists' needs, enhancing their satisfaction".

In view of the above, this study attempts to research into the satisfaction level and motivations of those cableway passengers, verify the legitimacy of local government's claim of "meeting tourists' needs, enhancing their satisfaction", discuss whether meeting the needs of tourist is equivalent to increasing their satisfaction level, examine tourists' satisfaction based on the Motivation-Hygiene Theory and provide some insights for the management of heritage sites.

## 2 METHODS

Taking into consideration the complexity of the research questions and the inapplicability of Western satisfaction measurement scale, this study conducts in-depth interviews with tourists instead of questionnaire survey. The framework of the outlines is illustrated by the



following diagram:

Diagram 1 Logical framework of researching tourist satisfaction

At present, the average waiting time per tourist in the site for cableways, elevators and other modern means of transport is about three hours, which becomes a favorable condition for this interview-based study. The

interviews were carried out when the tourists were waiting in line for their cableway/lift ride (both uplink and downlink). The following questions were asked:

(1) Measurement of motives (in order to check whether the demand has been met). Question: Why do you take the cableway/lift?

(2) Satisfaction level and perception of service quality. Question 1: What are you content with during your visit in Wulingyuan? Question 2: What are you discontented with during your visit in Wulingyuan?

The interviewees are 45 tourists (old, mid-aged and young) from over 10 different provinces and municipalities of China such as Human, Hubei, Guangdong, Yunnan, Zhejiang, Shangdong, Shanghai and many more. They are package tourists, provisional groups of tourists and individual tourists.

In addition, during August 24-27, 2006, in order to take full account of tourists' perception of Wulingyuan, the authors also searched and collected the comments from tourists on Wulingyuan in several major online tourism forums (such as [www.ctrip.com](http://www.ctrip.com)), where people share and exchange information about tourist destinations, as a supplement to the interviews.

## 3 CONCLUSION AND DISCUSSION

### 3.1 Conclusion

The study shows that the cableway/lift can meet the needs of tourists on three levels. The first is their spontaneous need to save time and energy and experience something new. The second refers to the need of conforming to others under peer pressure. The third level is the need forced upon the tourists by tour guides/travel agents, which sometimes is inevitable because of the asymmetry of information.

But on the other hand, scenic quality is recognized as a major factor that can increase their satisfaction level. Other factors

compromise their satisfaction, such as unethical conduct of small business operators, poor service quality, unfriendly local people and long hours waiting in line to get on the cableway/lift. While the cableway and lift can facilitate tourists' movement, they do not necessarily contribute to their overall satisfaction. Instead, their inadequacies dissatisfy tourists directly. This proves that meeting some needs of the tourists does not always enhance their overall satisfaction and that service quality is the key.

Therefore, the assertion "meet the needs of tourists, thus enhancing their satisfaction" is not built on solid ground. There is no theoretical support for it. In many scenic spots and heritage sites throughout Mainland China, all kinds of facilities are being built to meet the needs of tourists. But they fail to enhance tourist satisfaction, as shown by this study. In conclusion, catering to the needs of tourists is at least not a valid reason for tourism developments in heritage sites.

### 3.2 Discussion

As indicated by this study, cableway and other modern means of transport do not directly contribute to the overall satisfaction of heritage tourists. Of course, it can be argued that they can increase tourist satisfaction to some extent, but the overall satisfaction is severely compromised by the poor service quality and management skills. This indicates from another perspective that the absence of good service is more likely to dissatisfy tourists than a lack of facilities.

The results of this study coincide with the Motivation-Hygiene Theory. Some factors may not give positive satisfaction, but dissatisfaction results from their absence, such as good service quality and management skills. The improvement of services and management skills may eliminate dissatisfaction, but cannot enhance tourist satisfaction. They are called hygiene factors. Those factors that can provide positive satisfaction are called motivators. Cableway and lift act as motivators that can induce more satisfaction if properly

operated. But in this study, there is no satisfaction arising from them because the service and management accompanying them are so poor. Further research is required to support this assumption.

The competition among and within heritage sites in China to build facilities to attract more tourists has led to the "tragedy of the commons" (Zhang, 2006). Neither the legitimate operators, local residents and other stakeholders nor the tourists are the ultimate beneficiaries of this practice. In further reflection of this phenomenon, the question arises as how such highly scarce heritage resources should be managed and developed. Should more facilities be provided to cater to various needs of tourists, or should the demand of tourists be channeled to ensure a win-win situation?

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