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Research Article

Gap between tourism planning and implementation: A case of China

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Abstract

In tourism literature, a phenomenon is identified, and considered ubiquitous in planning exercise. Namely, a gap occurs between planning and implementation once the planned approach to tourism development is adopted. Such a phenomenon is not rare to find in China, where tourism has become increasingly important for the country's economy. This paper presents a research that attempts to examine the causes of the gap in a Chinese context, in order to offer insights about what possible countermeasures should be sought. A case study is adopted for the examination which focuses on the 3-year implementation of 2001–2020 Guniujiang Guanyintang Tourism Development Master Plan. These seven major causes are detected: flaws of master planning, planner's inadequate background survey and analysis, planner's inaccurate anticipation, planner's lack of practical experience, practitioner's misunderstanding, divergence of views between practitioner and planner, pitfalls of private investment and imbalance of development between regions of China.

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Keywords: China; Gap; Implementation; Planning; Tourism**1. Introduction**

It is widely acknowledged that planning is crucial to successful tourism development and management; and planning has been a widely adopted principle in tourism development at both regional and national levels (Inskeep, 1991; World Tourism Organization [hereafter WTO], 1994). Arguably, the merits of planning can only be possible given that a plan can be implemented in the first place. As such, experts suggest implementation be considered in the planning process; and a plan be practically made for this purpose (Cooper, Gilbert, Fletcher, & Wanhill, 1993; Gunn, 2002; Inskeep, 1991; McIntosh, Goeldner, & Ritchie, 1995; Shepherd, 1998; Veal, 2002). Ideally, a plan should be implemented as planned. In practice, however, planners are frequently challenged by the fact that their choices “are nuanced and have to balance idealism [what ought to happen by and for society] with pragmatism [what can happen with

private sector investment]” (Burns, 2004, p. 27). This situation creates a gap between planning and implementation (hereafter GPI), and has led to the failure of tourism plans. For instance, studies have recorded the failure of tourism development plans caused by lack of analytical details or miscalculations regarding the control of land usage (Cooper et al., 1993; Shepherd, 1998), the failure of central planning caused by lack of community involvement (Tosun & Jenkins, 1996), as well as mismatch between central planning and local possibilities (Burns & Sancho, 2003). GPI has been described in some ironic but telling terms, such as “paper exercises” (King, McVey, & Simmons, 2000, p. 413), “sitting on government shelves to collect dust” (Burns, 2004, p. 29), “perfunctory or bureaucratic exercise” (Gunn, 2002, p. 28) and “theoretical exercise” (Baidal, 2004, p. 322).

This phenomenon of GPI, or plans being aborted and inadequately implemented, is not rare in China's tourism planning exercises. Recently it was revealed at two forums—2001 China Tourism Planning Summit Workshop and 2001 Conference on Tourism Planning and Management in Developing Countries—that effective implementation of tourism planning had been rather weak in China.

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“*zhishang huahua, qiangshang guagua*” (drawn on the paper then hung on the wall), a well-known planning jargon, is just a Chinese edition of “paper exercise”. Wei (2004), former director of the Planning Department, China National Tourism Administration (hereafter, CNTA), criticizes that China’s tourism planning, especially at the master planning level, has come to the end in its present form for lack of innovations. Due to China’s continuous growth of the tourism economy in the 1990s (Zhang, 1995; Zhang & Lew, 2003), the number of plans has also increased dramatically in the country. Wei’s criticism suggests that China has experienced and will see high rate of plan abortion or poor implementation, which may seriously affect both the public and the private sectors involved if the countermeasures are not secured. Therefore, the major purpose of the research presented by this paper is to identify the causes of GPI in a specific Chinese setting so as to provide insights about what countermeasures should be sought.

The existing literature of tourism planning offers little in-depth study of GPI. It has focused much “on plan preparation and initial implementation”; “there is little or no consideration of what happens subsequently” (Pearce, 2000, p. 191). Some scholars do have touched or observed the phenomenon of GPI in the studies of community involvement (Ioannides, 1995; Tosun & Jenkins, 1996), miscalculations regarding the control of land usage (Cooper et al., 1993; Shepherd, 1998), mismatch between central planning and local possibilities (Burns & Sancho, 2003), shortage of funding resource for plan implementation (Inskeep, 1991), uncontrollable factors in the changing environment (Inskeep, 1991; Shepherd, 1998; WTO, 1994). Their studies on GPI, however, are somehow indirect, fragmented or lacking in empirical evidence. So the most obvious significance of this presented research is its attempt to supplement to the inadequacy of the existing tourism planning literature on GPI.

2. Method

The research is primarily based on the investigators’ recent involvement with a planning exercise for tourism development in the Guniujiang National Nature Reserve (hereafter GNNR). Established in 1988, GNNR is located across the borders of Qimen County and Shitai County in the southwest of China’s Anhui Province (see Fig. 1). The study is conducted first of all by reviewing the 3-year implementation of 2001–2020 Guniujiang Guanyintang Tourism Development Master Plan (hereafter GGTDMP, cf. Shenzhen Shenlanke Company Ltd., 2001), which has been steered by a private investor to develop a national park in the reserve. Now the planned area (approximately one sixth of the acreage of 18,535 hm²) has become a newly developed tourist attraction adjacent to the famous national mountain resort—Huangshan—in Anhui Province, bearing the name, Guniujiang National Geological Park (hereafter GNGP). The major reason for selecting the case is GGTDMP reflects the tourism planning undertaken in one of China’s inland provinces, Anhui. Compared with the more prosperous and developed coastal regions, the inland of China has been increasingly marginalized and lagged behind in social, cultural and economic development since the 1980s when the Chinese central government adopted the policy to give development priority to the coastal regions. In order to catch up with the more developed coastal regions, the inland provinces are trying to exploit their abundant natural resources for development. Tourism is deemed an important field for such exploitation. Recently in Anhui Province, various tourism projects have been initiated for boosting the local economic development. GGTDMP is just one of them. In the inland regions, development plans are subject to higher rate of abortion due to the comparatively less developed social, cultural and economic conditions, therefore may offer typically exemplifying cases for such a research.



Fig. 1. Location map of Guanyintang in Guniujiang National Nature Reserve (based on Han and Li (1990)).

The specific techniques for collecting and analyzing the data begin with a conceptualization of GPI, which aims to establish a theoretical framework for the research. While planning, in its broadest definition, is organizing the future to achieve certain objectives (Inskip, 1991), implementation literally denotes carrying out a plan to realize those objectives. So GPI can be regarded as a disparity or discontinuity between the two. To conceptualize GPI, an examination of the basic tourism planning process (see Fig. 2) is carried out, the results of which reveal two major phases—plan preparation and plan implementation. The whole process contains eight stages of which six are in the phase of plan preparation. They are study preparation, determination of objectives, surveys, analysis and synthesis, plan formulation and recommendations. Their ultimate purpose is to form “recommendations” that will guide activities in the phase of plan implementation, so as to achieve the goals of planning. The phase of plan implementation contains the last two stages. The first is to carry out the “recommendations” which are often made up of various action programs or projects indicated by specified schedules (WTO, 1994). The second is, by monitoring and reformulation, to assess the effects of implementation periodically and adjust the initially prepared “recommendations” according to the collected feedback regarding the plan’s implementation. The above examination of the basic tourism planning process reveals that GPI is a break of continuity, in tourism planning process, between “recommendations” (stage 6) and “implementation” (stage 7). GPI creates a disparity between the original intentions of planning and the actual implementation results. There exist two types of GPI (disparity): not implemented (the “recommendations” as a whole or in part fail to be carried out); deviated implementation (the plan’s implementation fails to observe the “recommendations”). This conceptualization of GPI leads to two major research questions that facilitate the study of the causes of GPI existing in the process of implementing GGTDMP. (1) To what extent have the elements of the “recommendations” of GGTDMP been implemented, in terms of carrying out the planned activities by planned schedules from 2001 to 2004? (2) What barriers to implementation has the park encountered during the course? These techniques are employed to seek the answers:

documentary study, on-site observation and in-depth interview. They are carried out via a four-step approach designed with reference to Pearce’s (2000) plan review methodology (see Fig. 3).

The first step is to sort out key implementation elements of GGTDMP which, in this research, is achieved by documentary study to find out the representative elements that should have been put into practice by 2004 according to the recommendations of the plan. The result serves as a “handbook” to guide further investigation. The second step is to assess effects of implementation by making a comparison between the selected elements in the “handbook” and the actual implementation results according to the data collected through on-site observation in the park and some relevant business performance records. The situations are highlighted where the implementation of the key elements has brought forth deviated outcomes (deviated implementation) and; where these elements have failed to be implemented at all (not implemented). The third step is to explore, through in-depth interview, the difficulties the park practitioners have met in carrying out the plan by 2004. Ten interviewees are selected out of the total 49 staff members of the park to represent the key managerial workers who are familiar with the content of the plan and have involved directly with the implementation. In the last step, the interview results about the

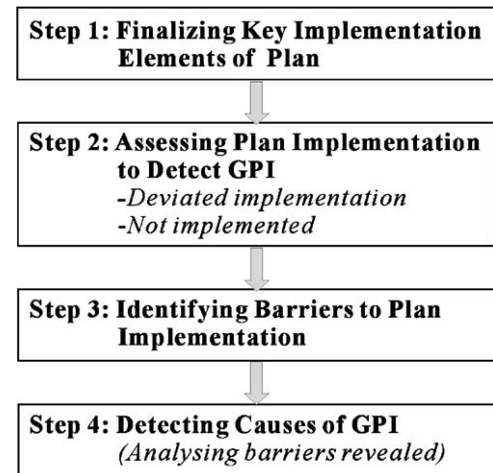


Fig. 3. Steps of research.

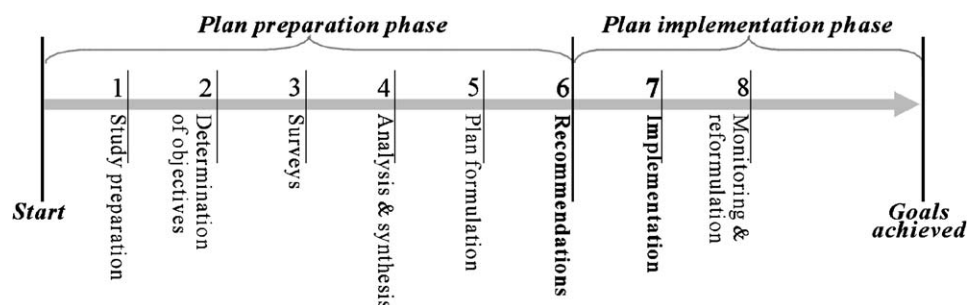


Fig. 2. Basic tourism planning process (based on Cooper et al. (1993); Inskip (1991); McIntosh et al.(1995); WTO (1994)).

difficulties experienced by the park practitioners in implementing the plan are examined in the perspective of the specific social and cultural contexts of Anhui Province for helping the researchers analyze the causes of the GPI.

3. Findings

3.1. Step 1 (finalizing key implementation elements of plan)

A review of the recommendations of GGTDMP helps finalize 33 elements as sampling indicators for detecting the GPI that may hinder implementing GGTDMP (see Table 1). The review process is developed with reference to some published methods (Gunn, 2002; WTO, 1994) consisting of six categories: tourist attractions (12), infrastructures (4), service facilities (6), promotion and marketing (4), human resource management (2) and environment management (5).

3.2. Step 2 (assessing plan implementation to detect GPI)

The examination regarding the 3-year implementation of GGTDMP helps detect 57.58% (19 out of 33) elements by which the GPI exists to hinder the implementation process:

- not implemented: 9 out of 19 elements (TA04, TA07, TA10, TA12, I04, SF02, SF04, PM02, PM03 and EM02); and
- deviated implementation: 10 out of 19 elements (TA02, TA03, TA05, TA08, PM01, PM04, HRM01, HRM02 and EM03).

The manifestations of the GPI are presented in Table 2.

3.3. Step 3 (identifying barriers to plan implementation)

Guided by the assessment results in Step 2, in-depth interviews are conducted to the general manager, the department managers and the staff workers of the park for collecting the primary data regarding the difficulties they have met in implementing GGTDMP (see Table 3). Specifically, the respondents are asked to answer three questions:

1. What is your opinion about postponing and/or advancing the implementation of the elements?
2. What kind of difficulties have you come across when carrying out the elements?
3. How have you adapted and/or will you adapt the elements to feasibly put them into practice?

From the above interviews and our on-site observations in the park, the barriers to the plan's implementation are drawn in Table 4. It can be seen that these barriers have a direct bearing on the practitioners' behaviors regarding "what", "when" and "how" in the plan implementation process. That is to say, the park practitioners prove to be very "selective" according to the level of difficulty in

Table 1
Representative implementation elements finalized in GGTDMP

Category	Elements selected	No.
Tourist attractions (TA)	Statue of ox	TA01
	Qimen black tea teahouse	TA02
	Water platform of Guniu Lake	TA03
	Square of ox culture	TA04
	Show house for the local traditional folk opera	TA05
	Spa centre for rehabilitation	TA06
	Guniujiang forest fresh air enjoyment club	TA07
	Recreation area in bamboo wood	TA08
	Green tour routes	TA09
	Dam of Guniu Lake	TA10
	Relics of Buddhist culture heritage	TA11
	Summer pavilion on Guniu Lake	TA12
Infrastructures (I)	Parking lots	I01
	Plant project for greening the major pathways in the park	I02
	Wooden plank path built along cliffs	I03
	Park battery car service for visitors' transport and sightseeing	I04
Service facilities (SF)	Park gate	SF01
	Wharf of small boat	SF02
	Tourist center of Guniu Lake	SF03
	Shops	SF04
	Ticket office	SF05
	Tourism interpretation system	SF06
Promotion and marketing (PM)	Anticipated arrivals	PM01
	Commercials for tourism promotion and marketing	PM02
	Customer relationship management	PM03
	Internet homepage (e-commerce)	PM04
Human resource management (HRM)	Organization structure	HRM01
	Anticipated HR demand	HRM02
Environment management (EM)	To establish eco-interpretation system	EM01
	To establish byelaws for protecting the eco-system	EM02
	To pull down the Hanbi Hotel that affects the scenery of the lake	EM03
	To improve environment around the Shanqing Temple Relics	EM04
	To remove toilet and hog pens in the bamboo woods, which were built by the relocated peasants and are now affecting the scenery	EM05

implementing a certain item recommended. When getting in trouble, they tend to modify or discard the item(s) in the implementation list.

3.4. Step 4 (detecting causes of GPI)

The barriers reported by the implementation people are carefully interpreted in this step. Since tourism mirrors the

Table 2
Manifestation of GPI

No.	Type of GPI	Deviation specifications
TA02	Deviated implementation	Part of the planned functions of the teahouse (tea art performance) is not installed
TA03	Deviated implementation	The size of the platform is too large and inappropriate, which affects the lake scenery
TA04	Not implemented	—
TA05	Deviated implementation	The stage is set up but the show of Mulian (a local opera) is not available to tourists
TA07	Not implemented	—
TA08	Deviated implementation	Only two swings and one climbing pole are set up, out of the facilities planned
TA10	Not implemented	—
TA12	Not implemented	—
I04	Not implemented	—
SF02	Not implemented	—
SF04	Not implemented	—
PM01	Deviated implementation	Tourism arrivals failed to meet the anticipated figure specified in the plan
PM02	Not implemented	—
PM03	Not implemented	—
PM04	Deviated implementation	The present homepage has not functioned in the form of e-commerce
HRM01	Deviated implementation	The administrative structure being actualized to run the park is completely different from what has been planned
HRM02	Deviated implementation	Number of the working staff is much smaller than that has been anticipated by the plan
EM02	Not implemented	—
EM03	Deviated implementation	Although the hotel is pulled town at a high fiscal cost, the ground base still exists, which, according to the plan, should be removed for the lake

economic, political and cultural features of a nation where it operates (Joppe, 1996), the reported barriers must be examined according to the specific situations within which the planning and implementation actually operate. Otherwise detecting the causes of the GPI will be out of the question. So, the differences of development among regions of China, the exercise of private investments, CNTA's regulations regarding tourism planning, as well as the background and performance of the planners are all considered. The result firstly reveals some serious flaws of master planning and the misunderstanding of those who implement the plan. In TA10, "lack of detailed measures for action in the plan" is reported as the cause of the GPI. One possibility of the cause is that the planners might have missed writing the relevant details in the plan. This, however, is not the case, when CNTA's rule is applied for examination (cf. "General Rule of Tourism Planning" by CNTA, 2003). The rule specifies that the task of master planning is to set policy and recommendation, in a tourism area, in order to achieve the purpose of building the main image and setting the scope of the development land. In addition, zoning and making arrangements for infrastructures and facilities are part of the main purpose. Therefore, detailing out the policies and recommendations regarding the construction is, by no means, the end task of master planning. Rather, it is an indispensable step in the process of planning itself. GGTDMF, a master level of planning as it is, bearing the content of TA10: "Raise the water level of Guniu Lake and beautify the dam of the lake" (cf. Shenzhen Shenlanke Company Ltd., 2001, p. 48) is considered sufficient. However, it is not sufficient for the content to avoid being complained about by the park practitioners who are to implement the plan.

There may be two reasons for the complaints. On one hand, master planning has inevitable flaws for being "one-shot, big-bang", similar to those identified by Burns (2004) and Gunn (2002). The flaws will result in too broad-brush and conceptualized planning instead of a feasible "plan of action". On the other hand, it may be the fault of the park practitioners who take it for granted that a master plan should be enough for developing a tourism project in GNNR. Consequently, they neglect the need of a detailed planning for the park. It is common for a single project to include various levels of planning, such as the exercises conducted elsewhere (WTO, 1994) which, however, is not true of the case in China. Tourism planners in China are mostly university academics capable of conducting master planning on theoretical basis, yet far from being capable of managing detailed (site) planning practically. Tourism planning requires the wisdom of multi-disciplinary expertise. University academics are often specialized in one or two specific field(s). They must form multi-disciplinary teams in order to accomplish tourism-planning tasks. In China, however, collaboration and cooperation among university academics are hard to materialize because they are most often competitors bidding for specific planning projects.

Secondly, the result indicates insufficient background survey and analysis by the planners in the early stage of planning are to blame for the failure in implementing most elements listed in GGTDMF. The elements include TA02 suggesting a lack of demand for the tea service provided which is incompatible with the local traditional tea culture; TA03, TA04, TA12, SF02 and SF04, which all indicate various constraints for constructing projects in the park; TA05, TA07 and I04, which respectively, indicate the

Table 3
Reports of practitioners' difficulties in implementing GGTDM

No.	Direct quotations from the in-depth interviews
TA02	<i>Quotation #1:</i> There is lack of market demand for this performance <i>Quotation #2:</i> Most tourists come here only for a cup of tea. The majority of them are young people, not fond of having tea. Generally Chinese people do not care for black tea, so we have not installed the facilities
TA03	<i>Quotation #3:</i> The business (tourist arrivals) is not stable <i>Quotation #4:</i> The usable land in this park is too scarce due to the rough and steep terrain. We need to build a platform by the lake for tourists <i>Quotation #5:</i> The planned size is too small. We actually use this platform as a performance stage that is supposed to stand in the nearby square. Tourists like this platform because the surrounding is more beautiful than other spots in the park
TA04	<i>Quotation #6:</i> We have not built the square because the hillside is too steep. There is a possibility that landslide will happen. As you can see we have planted bamboos to prevent possible landside in the rainy season. We will not consider it until the bamboos have grown up
TA05	<i>Quotation #7:</i> The performance is too bad. It is poorly organized, not interesting at all. They (the farmers) do not wear costume, and even not use makeup during performance <i>Quotation #8:</i> We tried it a few times but eventually have to give it up. There are only a few local aged farmers who can perform in this opera. It is difficult for tourists to understand the performance because of the dialect used. We need specialists' help to make the performance popular
TA07	<i>Quotation #9:</i> We have good environment but well trained, qualified staff workers
TA08	<i>Quotation #10:</i> We have to cut down the bamboo trees in order to make place for it, but my park needs the bamboo trees to decorate the lake surroundings. So, I want to move this function area to another place
TA10	<i>Quotation #11:</i> We need expert consultation about how the dam can be built in harmony with the landscape. However, there are no specific measures, in the plan, for achieving this
TA12	<i>Quotation #12:</i> The construction is too difficult because the lake water is very deep (over 30 m). We have thought about building one floating pavilion on the lake, but immediately find it impossible. In June and July when it keeps raining for more than a day, floods will form and destroy it
I04	<i>Quotation #13:</i> We only have one truck for cargoes at the moment. Our boss (the general manager) plans to buy a bus to carry tourists in and out of the park. But we have limited budget, thus finding the battery cars we currently use unsuitable because the road is too steep
SF02	<i>Quotation #14:</i> The lake is too small (average width: 7 m)
SF04	<i>Quotation #15:</i> There is insufficient land in the park for building shops. One solution of this is to cut down the woods. But we must apply for approval from the Ministry of Forest in order to do so, which is very time consuming
PM01	(No answers)
PM02	<i>Quotation #16:</i> I am not satisfied with the promotional commercials recommended (in the plan) so I invite my friends from Beijing to help design new ones <i>Quotation #17:</i> The commercials are complete in meaning but too wordy to impress the potential the clients
PM03	<i>Quotation #18:</i> We will establish it in the coming years when our major targeted market development is finished
PM04	<i>Quotation #19:</i> Now we are using more traditional promotion channels such as travel agencies in Huangshan City. They prove to be effective. To install e-commerce into our homepage, we need technicians. This means more investment is needed
HRM01	<i>Quotation #20:</i> We have not established the planned administrative structure for some economic concerns. At the early stage of the park development, we do not need so many departments
HRM02	<i>Quotation #21:</i> For me, the most serious problem is lack of qualified staff workers. I do not know how to make the stay either <i>Quotation #22:</i> Many skilled staff workers have left us. Most of our employees are young (average age: 20). They cannot stand the slow life pace and the loneliness in the tranquility of a natural environment like this. The low salary is also a reason for some to leave. Now we are thinking of providing some recreational facilities for the staff workers to enjoy, such as Karaoke, bar, playground, etc., in order to make the life here more interesting
EM02	<i>Quotation #23:</i> We will think about this later
EM03	<i>Quotation #24:</i> It is easy to dig the ground, but for the time being, we have to keep it until the square nearby have been built

difficulties for putting on the traditional local opera show—Mulian, establishing a forest fresh air enjoyment club, and providing tourists with the sightseeing battery cars. The applicability of all the elements mentioned above has not been well studied by the planners before they were listed for implementation. So the measures recommended for implementation are far from being practical. Besides, the drawbacks of master planning should also be accused, because its “one-shot, big-bang” nature does not have clear-cut requirements regarding how specific the background must be surveyed and analyzed.

Thirdly, the result indicates that the planners' anticipation about the future performance of the planned elements is rather inaccurate. It is acknowledged by experts such as

Gunn (2002) and Pearce (2000) that a plan should never be absolute about the future of what has been planned. Meeting the planned targets is subject to various unpredictable factors, which is particularly true of medium to long-term plans. Such plans normally range from 10 to 20 years, where the nature and impact of all relevant factors cannot be predicted at the outset with complete accuracy. A plan can only forecast a foreseeable future at the most. It is thus obvious that the inaccurate anticipation by the planners about the future performance of the planned elements has caused the GPI in PM01—anticipated annual tourist arrivals, HRM01—organization structure, and HRM02—anticipated human resource demand. It has turned out that the actual tourist arrival figure is much

Table 4
Barriers to the implementation of GGTDMP

No.	Barriers
TA02	Lack of market demand; incompatible with the local traditional tea culture; unstable business (demand)
TA03	Insufficient land for use on the rough and steep terrain; planned size too small; tourist need
TA04	Steep hillside vulnerable to landslide
TA05	Poor performance; lack of help from specialists
TA07	Lack of well trained staff workers
TA08	Dilemma over the choice of location for the function area
TA10	Lack of detailed measures for action in the plan
TA12	Lake water too deep for construction
I04	Limited budgets; slope too steep for providing sightseeing battery cars
SF02	Lake too small for construction
SF04	Insufficient land supply; time consuming procedure for gaining the approval from the Ministry of Forest
PM01	(No answers)
PM02	Tourism promotional commercials too wordy and unattractive to consumers
PM03	Targeted market development unfinished
PM04	Lack of technicians and funds
HRM01	Economic concerns; some departments planned but neither practical nor unnecessary
HRM02	Lack of qualified staff workers; loss of skilled workers
EM02	(No direct answers)
EM03	Nearby square not been built yet

Table 5
Actual and anticipated tourist arrivals of GNGP between 2002 and 2004 (based on Shenzhen Shenlanke Company Ltd., 2001 and the survey result)

	2002	2003	2004
Actual arrivals	* ^a	*	15,060
Anticipated arrivals	20,000	25,200	31,600

^aThere are no official records for 2002 and 2003.

smaller than the anticipated (see Table 5), and some administrative departments cannot be established for the lack of qualified employees—so far there have been only 49 staff workers, much fewer than the total 90 recommended in GGTDMP for completing the workforce of the park. Also worth mentioning is that the outbreak of Severe Acute Respiratory Syndrome in 2003 decreased the tourist arrivals of the year dramatically. Circumstance like this is absolutely difficult to predict at the time when the plan was made and endorsed in 2001.

Fourthly, the result indicates that the planners' lack of practical experience is also to blame. In the case of PM02, the practitioners completely reject the planners' design of the park promotional commercials. In an interview, the park general manager reveals his dissatisfaction with the planners' recommendation: "I am not satisfied with the design, so I invite my friends from Beijing to help design new ones" (direct quotation from the research interview). This is simply because, according to the sales manager, the commercials designed by the planners express

the meaning but appear to be too wordy and unattractive. This phenomenon is probably caused by the planners' lack of practical experience in park promotion and marketing. In China, tourism development projects, in most cases, are planned by university academics who are not professional planners. Therefore they may not have adequate practical business knowledge relevant to the projects they are invited to plan for.

Fifthly, the result suggests that the divergence of views between the planners and the park practitioners are a big obstacle to implementation. A closer look at TA08 by which a "Recreation Area in Bamboo Wood" is planned, the cause of the GPI appears to be the divergence of views, between the planners and the park practitioners, over how it should be implemented. The planners recommend creating a recreation area in the bamboo wood around the Guniu Lake, which requires cutting part of the wood. But the park general manager does not like the idea. His argument is that the park needs the green bamboo trees to enhance the lake scenery. He would like to move the recreation area to another place in the park. No detailed planning has been specified regarding this matter, so the park general manager just acts, partially as a planner and, in the meantime, an interpreter to do the actual job of implementation, with the assistance of his business friends and clients. Similar divergence of views regarding how to implement the planned elements can also be found in TA03, PM02, PM03 and EM03.

Sixthly, the result uncovers the pitfalls of private investment. By introducing EM02, the planners suggest establishing byelaws to protect the eco-system of GNGP. However, in the park practitioners' view this is not an urgent matter to handle, obvious in the attitude repeatedly shown during the interviews: "we will consider that later in due time" (direct quotation from the interview). Such an attitude toward protecting the eco-system is probably encouraged by the private investment in the park. In recent years there have been an increasing number of private entrepreneurs, coming especially from the wealthier neighboring Zhejiang Province, to invest in the tourism projects of Anhui. On one hand, such investment satisfies the hunger for development capital long held by the poorer Anhui Province and contributes to the local economic development including tourism. On the other hand, such private investment has pitfalls. In most cases, the private investors will put the local economic development and environment protection behind their own profit. This is also true of the private investment in GNGP. In an interview, the general manager explicitly expresses that he is only a businessman whose main job is to make money. In his view, what is most important for planning is to initiate a project and generate quick profits.

Lastly, the result shows that the GPI exists due to the imbalance of development among regions of China. Regarding HRM02, the GPI exists in the reality that GNGP cannot keep its qualified staff workers. The park general manager and human resource manager have been

complaining about the difficulty of maintaining a qualified workforce to run the park. The direct cause of the GPI regarding HRM02 is the withdrawal of qualified staff workers from the workforce of the park. The park human resource manager blames this for that most of the park employees are too young to stand the tranquil and lonely life in the park. This, however, reveals only a tiny part of a big picture. The investigation finds the current imbalance of development between regions of China actually encourages the park employees to leave for the wealthier places of China's more developed coastal regions to work. Anhui, where GNGP is located, has been lagged behind in social, cultural and economic development, being a marginalized inland province. As matter of fact, it has long experienced a depopulation of its workforce since the 1980s when the Chinese central government adopted the policy that gives development priority to the coastal regions.

4. Conclusion

This article has so far presented a research on the 3-year implementation of a master plan regarding a national nature reserve in Anhui, China. The study reveals a gap exists between the planners' intention and the actual implementation results. More than half of the sampling elements have not been effectively implemented. The park practitioners have met various barriers, such as physical construction limits, lack of funds, unstable market demand, lack and loss of managerial staff and technicians, and insufficient implementation instructions. By analyzing those barriers, the major causes of the GPI are found to be: flaws of master planning, planner's inadequate background survey and analysis, planner's inaccurate anticipation, planner's lack of practical experience, practitioner's misunderstanding, divergence of views between practitioner and planner, pitfalls of private investment, and imbalance of development between regions of China. Based on those findings, the following recommendations are specifically raised for the park to reduce the impact of the GPI.

First of all, the park practitioners, especially the general manager, should acquire some basic knowledge of planning to prevent misunderstandings to it. The false concept that a master plan is enough must be corrected. The difference between master planning and detailed planning should be appreciated. This can largely help prevent the impacts caused by choosing the wrong or inappropriate type of planning. Besides, the park managers must stop acting as a planner. The past practice of the park shows it was usually the park managers who had actually conducted some of the detailed planning. Their efforts deserve respect, but in the long run may be detrimental to the overall strategy and sustainability of tourism development in the reserve, because they are, after all, lacking in planning expertise and experience. Secondly, the park practitioners need to act right now to compensate for the losses caused by the flaws of master planning. The initial implementation of GGTDMPP must be reviewed comprehensively to find out

elements that should be altered, updated, or even canceled. It is essential now for the park to have a site planning, by professionals, to provide more detailed instructions for plan implementation in the next phase. Thirdly, the park practitioners should write, by themselves or through the assistance of some relevant professionals, a valid term of reference (hereafter TOR). In doing so, they can make sure their real wants will be clearly articulated and thus choose the most competent planners to meet such wants. A well-prepared TOR can help prevent unqualified planners from taking the planning project(s) at the outset. Fourthly, the park managers need to establish an interactive relationship with both the present and future planners of GGTDMPP. During the planning process of GGTDMPP, communications between the park managers and the planners were not enough. The managers should have actively involved in the planning stage to eliminate any disputes between both sides before the plan can be ratified and legitimized, instead of interpreting the plan arbitrarily in the implementation stage. In this studied case, for instance, the "planner-practitioner" tie broke once the plan was ratified in 2001. As a result, plan monitoring and reformulation, crucial for feasible and effective implementation of the plan, failed to materialize in the past 3 years (similar failures have also been reported by the studies of Gunn, 2002; Inskeep, 1991; WTO, 1994; Yuksel, Bramwell, & Yuksel, 1999). Consequently, the park practitioners themselves have to confront the difficulties in implementing the plan. Such a difficult situation can be improved by applying customer relationship management to establish a dynamic "planner-practitioner" tie. By doing so, it is necessary to organize training programs on implementation issues, set up a monitoring committee and, appoint when necessary, experts from the planning team to supervise the implementation. Finally, it is the park managers who should balance between the short-term and long-term benefits during the development process. The park is located in a national nature reserve where the eco-system is rather fragile and highly sensitive to human activities. Any short-term economic gains achieved at high environmental costs will prove to be detrimental to the overall well-being of the park itself.

The above recommendations put forward, it is now time for us to fulfill the ultimate task—drawing insights about the countermeasure against GPI. We are well aware that risk of a logic fallacy ("unit of analysis") would occur if we were too ambitious to seek countermeasures, in general, for China to cope with GPI, on the basis of such a single case study. But we believe that the causes of the GPI revealed through our research can somehow offer insightful policy implications for that purpose. The first implication we can see through this study is master planning approach, prevailing in China at the moment, is out-of-date. Although China's strongly centralized economy still encourages this kind of top-down planning approach (especially for the government initiated planning projects), Inskeep (1991) has proven, for more than a decade, such an approach would only produce unfeasible plans over the

long term. A possible countermeasure is, as also recommended by WTO (1994), to integrate master planning at nation, region and destination scales with detailed site planning for priority development areas and projects. This will help ensure concrete “plans of action” for practitioners to follow in the process of implementation. The second implication is the professionalism of planning and management needs to be significantly improved. Our case study shows the inadequate implementation of quite a number of elements is caused, at least partially, by the inadequate qualification and experience of the planner. A possible countermeasure can be setting up a nation-wide qualification control system to guarantee the quality of planning. This system will require a planner be certified before she/he can provide planning service. The third implication is mechanism that can facilitate the bilateral planner-practitioner tie needs to be established. After a planning project is finished, the tourism planner must still keep close contact with the clients to ensure that the implementation follows up well. This will create a win-win situation in which the planner can learn from the practice and gain valuable experience of planning, and the client can get incremental consultation that will guarantee appropriate plan implementation. Last but not least, a multi-scenario planning method should be adopted for overcoming unforeseeable obstacles that may rise in the ever-changing situation of plan implementation. The method requires the planner conduct a thorough study of the social, cultural, economic and environmental obstacles that may hinder the implementation of the plan, so that different development scenarios can be presented for the practitioners to predict, more accurately, when and how those obstacles can be eliminated in a “foreseeable future”.

To sum up, in this research we have focused on a long existing yet largely neglected planning problem: gap between planning and implementation. Our critical eye on a specific case of tourism planning in China does not intend to deny the merits of planning as an approach to tourism development. Rather, we aim to help enhance quality of tourism planning by offering insightful implications about what workable countermeasures should be sought against GPI, particularly regarding the planning exercise in China. Our theoretical framework developed through this research should also be useful for plan reviewing and monitoring, regarding which relevant methods are lacking and yet to be found out. In terms of further studies on GPI, we believe efforts other than simply reporting and criticizing the phenomenon should be made. In particular, mid and long-term examination of plan implementation under the very context of China is urgently needed. This kind of examination will help learn lessons from the failure of past planning exercises, and make planning a real powerful tool that “has the ability to realize the advantages of tourism and reduce the disadvantages” (McIntosh et al., 1995, p.337). All in all, GPI must be prevented because it significantly reduces the effect of planning on tourism development. It is not an easy job, as

shown by this study, to completely avoid GPI, because in an ever changing environment “[planning] projects seldom follow their prearranged schedules exactly” (Inskip, 1991, p. 439). That is probably why implementation largely tends to be rather visionary. However, it is the very unpredictable future that requires planning for tourism development. Despite the public criticism on plan abortions, planning as an approach to tourism development will continue to show its crucial role in visualizing the future for guiding principles to form, which will help avert the pitfalls in the tourism development process.

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