The role of institutions in the production of space for tourism: National Forest Parks in China

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Abstract

Nature-based tourism is a global phenomenon, with traditional forms of use of natural areas, such as wood harvesting and agriculture, paving the way for ecotourism. However, there has been limited exploration of the role of institutions in driving this transition. Consequently, this paper sought to explore the role of institutions in producing space for tourism within National Forest Parks (NFPs) in China. To achieve this objective 68 national-level policy documents from 1949 to 2014 were collected and analyzed. Findings demonstrate a transformation in the role of NFPs, orchestrated by the state, capital and society for tourism. In particular, NFPs, as an ideological space in national development, were not only an outcome of economic, social, political, and ecological processes, but also balanced the power between the state, capital and society. Institutional changes mirrored the dynamic relationship between the state, capital and society in China. Future research should focus on the role of institutions in producing space for tourism for and within parks at the local level, especially in developing contexts.

Keywords: Tourism; Conservation; Spatiality; Institution; National Forest Parks; China

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Highlights: Forest Policy Economics

- Explored the role of institutions in producing tourist-consuming space from wood-harvesting space in National Forest Parks (NFPs) in China.
- **Rich descriptive case study of how** institutional changes mirrored the dynamic role in NFPs played by the state, capital and society in China.
- Findings demonstrate NFPs transitioned from a regional economic development tool to a mixture of economic, social, political and ecological requirements.
- A three-phased conceptual triad reflecting the shift in the state, capital and society in NFPs in China from 1982 to 2014 is presented.
- Future research should focus on the interaction between the state, capital and society at the local level.

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1. Introduction

Recreation and tourism is a widespread phenomenon in natural areas (Elands and van Marwijk, 2012). In many locations around the world forests have been transitioned to tourism at the expense of more utilitarian interests such as wood harvesting (Luo and Bao, 2013). The transition of forest landscapes to state governance has not been a smooth process, with considerable debate between state agencies and local residents involved in establishing protected areas (Blicharska and Van Herzele, 2015; Roth, 2008). As such, policy on the production of space and the provision of sustainable livelihoods for local people has emerged as an important aspect of forest conservation (Roth, 2008). Both are constantly dynamic, evolving in conjunction with associated social, political, economic and ecological processes (Mels, 2002). Lefebvre (1991: 49) noted that natural space is part of “the invisible fullness of political space” mediated by “knowledge, technology, money, precious objects, words of art and symbols” (Lefebvre, 1991: 51). Nevertheless, there has been limited research on the role of institutions in the production of space for nature based tourism in national forest or parks, especially in countries experiencing periods of rapid economic growth or political reform.

By the end of 2014, China had created nine different types of parks, consisting of more than 2,708 national-level protected areas, managed by different government agencies. The principal types are Forest Parks, Nature Reserves, Geoparks, Wetland Parks, Mining Parks, Marine Parks, Historic and Interest Areas, Water Reserve Parks and Cultural Parks. Each type may be administered at the national, provincial or local level. A total of 791 National Forest Parks (NFPs) have been constructed and managed by the China State Forestry Administration (CSFA) since 1982, covering 1.25% of China’s terrestrial surface. The CSFA (2015) reported that forest recreation received more than 700 million domestic and foreign visitors and over US\$11 billion in revenue, playing a vital role in economic sustainability at the national and regional level.

Despite considerable growth in the number of parks in China, there has been limited inquiry into the role of institutions in the production of space for nature based

1 tourism in national forest parks (NFPs). China is an exceptionally interesting case
2 study to explore this phenomenon, as specific political, cultural, historical and
3 institutional issues have affected the (re)configuration of space (Ma and Wu, 2005,
4 McGee, 2009, Sofield and Li, 2011).

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7 Consequently, the aim of this research is to explore the production of space for
8 tourism in NFPs in China from an institutional perspective. To achieve this aim this
9 research is driven by three key objectives. First, this research sets out to understand
10 the core drivers in national-level policy that led to the production of NFPs driven by
11 tourism. Second, this research explores the interaction between the state, capital and
12 society in the production of NFPs over different national-level policy cycles. Third,
13 this research seeks to develop a conceptual model illustrating the interaction between
14 the state, capital and society that led to the production of space for NFPs for testing
15 and application in other contexts. The contribution of this manuscript lies in a rich
16 case study of the role of institutions in the production of space for tourism to natural
17 and protected areas. Specifically by using an in-depth exploration of government
18 policy documents, this paper focuses on how the production of space for tourism in
19 NFPs has been dynamically shaped from an institutional perspective, at the national
20 level.

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2. Literature Review

2.1. Conceptualizations of space

Previous research on the concept of space has predominantly been conceptualized through the lens of western social science (McGee, 2009; Roth, 2008; Soja, 1989). Core theoretical approaches have been developed through the discipline of geography, where there has been a long-standing belief that the concept of space is shaped from the social meaning of peoples' lives (Harvey, 1973; Lefebvre, 1991; Massey, 2005; Soja, 1989), with space no longer appearing to be a static platform of social relations (Yrigoy, 2014).

Seminal work which sought to examine the relationship between space and social change was developed by Lefebvre (1991). He defined spatiality as "both the medium and outcome" of situated human agency and systems of social practice, proposing a unitary theory of space that ties together the physical, the mental and the social, which introduced a "triad" for the production of space (Lefebvre, 1991, 2003; Lefebvre and Enders, 1976). Simultaneously, space is both a *spatial practice*, including an externalized, material environment, as well as a process by which materiality is

1 produced. Concomitantly, a *representation of space* is the verbal description,
2 language and the written word created by scientists, planners and social engineers
3 (Lefebvre, 1991). Alternately, *space of representation* is space that is symbolic,
4 subjective, “qualitative, fluid and dynamic” (Merrifield, 1993 p .11). Furthermore,
5 Lefebvre (1991: 84) denoted that national parks, similar to NFPs, are “products of an
6 activity that involves the economic and technical realms but which extends well
7 beyond them, for these are also political products, and strategic spaces”. Recent
8 research often applies Lefebvre’s (1991) spatial triad as a theoretical framework for
9 empirical research on the production of space (Buser, 2012; Frisvoll, 2012; Hossain,
10 2012; Leary, 2013; Mels, 2002; Roth, 2008). Despite the various interpretations, the
11 spatial triad has been criticized for its intuitive simplicity, conceptualization and
12 totality (Gottdiener, 1993; Leary, 2013; Schmid, 2008; Ye et al., 2014). In addition,
13 Lefebvre (1991) does not account for complex interactions that occur in the rapidly
14 shifting dynamic nexus of the spatial triad, resulting in difficulties interpreting and
15 adapting the concept (Merrifield & Lefebvre, 2000).

27 2.2. *Interplay between the state, capital and society*

28 Empirical studies have concluded that space is often used as a political tool for
29 state regulation (Roth, 2008), primarily focusing on the production of a social world
30 to commodify the productive factors and livelihood assets (Butler, 2009). Arguably,
31 the concept of “social” in spatial production should be considered in a broader sense,
32 reflecting all social actions and relations (Ye et al., 2014). This assertion leads to the
33 conclusion that space is constantly dynamic, evolving in conjunction with associated
34 social, political, and economic processes (Roth, 2008). As a result, the concept of
35 space is often divided into three interrelated subcomponents – political, economic and
36 social – which are also intricately intertwined with the state, capital and society
37 (Schmid, 2008; Ye et al., 2014).

38 Historically, policies implemented by states tend to prioritize the production of
39 space in specific locations and at precise scales (Brenner, 1999). Consequently, policy
40 initiatives have been found to neglect, marginalize or exclude other viable locations
41 (Jones, 1999). Space is inherently connected to emergent political strategies that are
42 oriented towards the creation of new geographies, created by state policy and
43 political–economic life (Brenner, 2004). For instance, Harms (2011: 238) asserted that
44 “state power endures only by virtue of violence directed towards a space”, with
45 “idealized conceptions of spatial order”, which would have a substantial impact on
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1 tourism development processes by political philosophy and ideology (Hall, 1998). In a
2 study on Swedish national parks, Mels (2002) argued that empty space represents the
3 understanding of national parks as “pure” nature; organic space links nature to the
4 conception of “Swedishness” and optical space embodies the visual immediacy by a
5 multimedia dialectic of images, texts and maps respectively.
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9 In addition, previous studies have identified capital as critical in generating
10 economic interest in the production of space (Harvey, 1982; Lefebvre, 1991; Yrigoy,
11 2014). However, capital has been found to have the potential to produce space solely
12 to produce a profit (Yrigoy, 2014). Market-based modernization and economic growth
13 strategies have been critiqued as viewing land as a commodity, rather than as a
14 social–ecological resource for livelihood generation (Hansen, 2013; Lefebvre, 1991;
15 Roth, 2008). Inquiry has also centered on the potential dichotomy between state and
16 society, with flexible spatial strategies demonstrated to strengthen social relationships
17 between local communities and state conservation agencies (Roth, 2008). Negotiation
18 between core stakeholder groups has been identified as a key part of park–people
19 conflict, with outcomes intertwined with community sentiment towards the
20 production of space (Roth, 2008).
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23 *2.3. Political economy in tourism*

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25 The “political economy of tourism” emerged in the early 2000s (Nunkoo &
26 Smith, 2013), yet arguably still remains relatively conceptually underdeveloped
27 within the tourism field (Yrigoy, 2014). The production of space has been applied to
28 tourism in recent times as a means to analyze the political economy and develop new,
29 special strategies for landscape conservation. For instance, Roth (2008) argues for the
30 reconceptualization of spatial conflict among parks and people, noting the production
31 of space should be viewed not as a process whereby state (abstract) space erases or
32 destroys local (complex) space, but as a moment of spatial reorganization resulting
33 from the continual process of state and local spatial production. Hansen (2013) noted
34 that in Thailand spatial conflict often emerges through tensions between the imposed
35 conservation objectives of World Heritage Sites and the subjective space of users and
36 inhabitants. Yrigoy (2014) found that the “spatial fix” of capital could not be
37 explained without including the state and local agencies in tourism. Thus, institutional
38 mechanisms need to be created to encourage active state and community participation
39 in tourism planning and governance (Hansen, 2013; Roth, 2008; Ye et al., 2014;
40 Yrigoy, 2014).
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1 Although there is no universally agreed school of thought institutions are often
2 considered as the rules of the game in a society or, more formally, are the humanly
3 devised constraints that shape human interaction (North, 1981, 1990). Broadly, a
4 plethora of literature documents a strong connection between economic institutions
5 and economic performance in different countries (Knack and Keefer, 1995; Mauro,
6 1995). With growing recognition of the need for theory that can account for
7 institutional change, there has been a subsequent increase in tourism literature in
8 relation to institutional research (Bramwell, 2006; Bramwell and Cox, 2009;
9 Bramwell and Lane, 2011, 2014; Bramwell and Meyer, 2007), specifically tourism
10 transformation (McLennan et al., 2012, 2013, 2014) and governance (Hall, 2011;
11 Hultman and Hall, 2011). Within these two interconnected bodies of knowledge it has
12 been argued that institutional change is a critical factor with the capacity to drive
13 tourism development (Dredge & Jenkins, 2011).

14 Institutional theory is a broad interdisciplinary field, with early foundations in
15 the management and policy literature. Early theoretical discourse centered on the use
16 of organizations as technical instruments, designed as a means to achieve specified
17 goals (Scott, 1987). However, more contemporary research has identified institutional
18 theory “as an approach to understanding organizations and management practices as
19 the product of social rather than economic pressures” (Suddaby, 2013, p. 379). This
20 has become an increasingly popular perspective in management theory for an ability
21 to account for organizational behavior that often seems to defy economic rationality.
22 Importantly for this manuscript institutions have been identified in previous studies as
23 core drivers of policy, especially at the national level, connecting with how space is
24 produced, reconfigured and transformed (Braverman, 2015).

25 For instance, interactions between state, capital and society have the capacity to
26 produce different “spatialities” (Lefebvre, 1991; Mels, 2002; Roth, 2008).

27 Nevertheless, theory surrounding the production of space requires conceptual clarity
28 and refinement, in addition to enrichment via in-depth descriptive case study analyses
29 in different geographic contexts (Roth, 2008; Ye et al., 2014; Yrigoy, 2014).

30 Specifically, the application of core concepts central to the production of space has
31 received limited attention in socialist states, as well as in developing economies
32 (McGee, 2009; Nguyen and Locke, 2014; Roth, 2008). In addition, there is limited
33 research on the production of space to support national-level policy that focuses on
34 developing specific economic sectors, such as tourism, to diversify areas experiencing

a decline in traditional industries, such as forestry.

3. Methodology

3.1 Background to case study

Over the past 30 years, the economic, social and institutional environment in China has changed profoundly. As a result of shift in government policy, particularly surrounding opening up and reform, tourism in China has been encouraged to forge diplomatic relationships (Zhang & Xiao, 2014). Consequently, different types of attractions have been developed to meet the needs of tourists, with nature based tourism emerging in prominence.

Nature based tourism in China is designed to preserve and showcase unique landscapes, rich in history and culture (Wang et al., 2012). However, the process of the growth, development and expansion of nature based tourism opportunities is deeply entrenched in traditional Chinese approaches to governance. As such, the reconstruction of space for parks, and reorganization of the spatial structures within parks has synergies, as well as differences, with the approaches documented in western literature (Luo & Bao, 2013; Zhang & Xiao, 2014). Table 1 displays China's classification system for National Parks.

<INSERT TABLE 1 ABOUT HERE>

As displayed in Table 1, in China, to the end of 2014 there are 2708 parks, including 791 NFPs. This research focuses on the creation and allocation of space for NFPs, which first emerged in the early 1980's to reform, open up and reinvigorate China's forests. Although not the largest type of national park in China, NFPs are emerging in importance for domestic and international visitors, and thus have become vital for economic sustainability at both the national and regional level (Luo & Bao, 2013). At the provincial level, the local government is responsible for the construction of space for parks.

3.2 Data collection and analysis

Systematic approaches to reviewing policy documents are becoming increasingly popular in studies on the governance of natural areas, especially from an institutional

perspective (Arts and Buizer, 2009; Leipold, 2014). To explore the production of space for tourism in NFPs in China a systematic review of policy as well as other key documents was undertaken. Policy documents were identified using a systematic online search of electronic databases, using a series of 15 key words derived from previous literature and consultation with experts (Hu and He, 2012; Tang, 2014). Key words included ‘modernization’, ‘diversification’, ‘economy’, ‘state-owned enterprise’, ‘sustainable development’, ‘ecological cultivation’, ‘forestry’ and ‘tourism’, ‘forest park’, ‘forest tourism’, ‘state-owned forest farm’, ‘ecological forestry’ and ‘wellbeing forestry’ ‘ecotourism’ and ‘nature conservation’. Databases searched included the Central Committee of the Communist Party of China’s (CCCPC) database to identify policies and regulations for NFPs at the national level, the database of the CSFA, by China National Tourism Administration (CNTA), respectively.

Databases were searched between October 2014 and May 2015, with three sequential stages used to collect data. First, 15 policy documents (including nine reports and six leaders’ speeches) were collected from the CCCPC database. Second, 44 annual reports between 1949 and 2012 related to forestry and tourism were collected from the China National Knowledge Infrastructure (CNKI) network, including 26 speeches from leaders of the CSFA and CNTA,. Third, nine reports and speeches were collected from the official websites of the CSFA and CNTA between 2012 and 2014. Finally, data from four major events demonstrated to influence Chinese society were added to the data set. This process resulted in 68 documents exported into MS Excel for discourse analysis in Table 2.

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The MS Excel database was scrutinized to discern the relevance of the information to NFPs by utilizing two key techniques. First, the documents were reviewed by an independent party to determine whether the information collected was relevant to NFPs. Second, following an approach by Moyle et al., (2014) a select sample of articles was manually scrutinized for relevance to national forest parks. A two tiered process was used to systematically analyze the documents collected (Ritchie & Spencer, 2002). First, documents from the CCCPC were used to provide a background to the broader historical and societal context in China (Bowen, 2009).

Second, specific documents from CSFA and CNTA data were used to provide further depth to the dynamic changes in the production of space for NFPs. Following this, key words on NFPs in different stages were manually derived by data crosschecking (Creswell, 2009). Results reported are aggregated rather than presented as source-specific evidence, as often the quotes selected do not appear in one particular document, but can be found in several documented sources. As such, data is presented in chronological order, often cited as a more appropriate way of presenting institutional change over the long term rather than a traditional thematic analysis (Fitzgerald, 2007).

4. Results

Findings of this research demonstrate that National Forest Parks (NFPs) are a concentrated reflection of national major principles and policies in forestry. According to the memorabilia after the reform and opening up of China, the third plenary session of the 11th CCCPC in 1978, Deng Xiaoping's south talk in 1992, the 16th the National Congress of CPC (NCCPC) in 2002 and the 18th NCCPC in 2012 have been identified as key events affecting the process of the economic, political and social development in China (China Reform Data, 2015). To illustrate the critical role of these four key events, as well as national level policy, in the development of NFPs in China, the structure of the results is divided into five subsections; prior to the establishment of NFPs (1949-1981), the state-led pilot stage (1982-1991), state deteriorating and capital advancing (1992-2001), the capital's acceleration and regulation strengthened by the state (2002-2011) and the intersection of the state, capital and society (2012-present), respectively (Fig.1).

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4.1. Prior to the establishment of National Forest Parks (1949–1981)

In 1949, at the first plenary session of the Chinese People's Political Consultative Conference (CPPCC), the 34th article stipulated that the “policy is to protect forests and develop forests systematically” (CSFA, 1986a: 608). The period prior to the establishment of NFPs was characterized by the construction of “forest farms” (CSFA, 1986a: 608), especially during the 1950s, with the primary intention of harvesting wood after a 20-year growth cycle. However, at the end of the 1970s forest farms

entered a tumultuous period with the characteristics of an “economic and ecological crisis” (Luo, 1978: 591) due to an oversupply of workers, low productivity and issues with accessibility to key areas of the forest. This realization sparked an ongoing debate over the core purpose of forests in China, with a specific emphasis on how to leverage the unique environmental and cultural values in forests to overcome key economic, environmental and social issues.

As a result of this debate the third plenary session report of the 11th CCCPC in 1978 argued that policy reform must be undertaken in a partnership between “the party and the state to drive modernization” (CCCPC, 1978: n.p.). Deng Xiaoping, who was responsible for China’s reform and opening-up policy, made the initial recommendation to develop and expand the tourism sector, especially for international tourism (He, 1999). As a result of this national-level policy directive CSFA commenced developing NFPs to open up China’s forests for nature-based tourism. Under the direction of reform, development and revitalization forestry diversification, focusing specifically on logging, herbing and fishing, accelerated the development of NFPs. Guidelines were developed, setting a prescribed governance structure for NFPs to “establish and improve production in order to develop diversification” (Zhao, 1980: n.p.) into agriculture and tourism.

As a consequence of economic diversification the concepts of “forest tourism” and “forest park” (CSFA, 1986b: 149) first emerged in 1980, with eight forest farms selected as the first pilot parks for forest tourism in 1981. Initial pilot sites were selected due to a unique geological landscape, biodiversity values and tourism potential.

4.2. Policy cycle 1: The state-led pilot stage (1982–1991)

In 1982 the opening report of the 12th NCCPC stated that “the modernization of agriculture, military, science and technology would be gradually realized” (CCCPC, 1982: n.p.), transforming China into a civilized and democratic socialist state. During policy cycle 1, forestry was identified as an “urgent task” (CCCPC, 1986: 26) with debate ensuing over “forest conservation and forest development” (Dong, 1986: 645). After a 20-year growth cycle the forest in Zhangjiajie state-owned forest farm matured. However, due to the inaccessibility of roads, logging experienced a period of decline. Meanwhile, the unique geological landscape coupled with community desire to travel resulted in Zhangjiajie in Hunan province being established as a pilot project

for NFPs. The opening of the Zhangjiajie NFP created a new chapter, not only for nature conservation in China but also for recreation for Chinese people. In essence, Zhangjiajie NFP not only created the potential to generate economic revenue for adjacent communities, but also provided confidence to reform China's forest industry, with nine further pilot NFPs developed from 1982–1991 (Table 3).

<INSERT TABLE 3 ABOUT HERE>

Under the Communist Party of China's direction of reform the CSFA began to initiate the development of tourism within China's forests. Policy direction shifted "to achieve four key changes in forestry, specifically shifting the traditional closed forestry into modern forestry and providing economic, ecological, and social benefits" (Dong, 1986: 646). As a result, NFPs became an important element in diversifying regional economies, with governments beginning to recognize that investment in tourism had the potential to generate economic benefits. For example, Qiandaohu NFP received 23.22 million tourists, including 4,566 international tourists, from 1982–1988. Furthermore, in 1988 Qiandaohu NFP generated tourism revenue of over US\$2 million for the local economy.

4.3. Policy cycle 2: State deteriorating and capital advancing (1992–2001)

In 1992 development was identified as fundamental, with China directed to concentrate on economic prosperity and not dwell on the issues of "capitalism" or "socialism" in Deng Xiaoping's South Talk (CCCPC, 1992, n.p.). The 14th and 15th NCCPC set out to establish the system of a socialist market economy to develop national productivity, due to the realization that "the market plays a fundamental role in resource allocation" (CCCPC, 1997: n.p.). In addition, fiscal policy reform shaped the local government to be enterprise-led, viewing land in NFPs as an asset that needed to be developed, with the potential to produce commercial benefits to improve livelihoods. During this period it was advocated that "the reform of state-owned forest farms should be guided by the market, without intervention" (Xu, 1993: 19).

Concurrently, China's tourism industry was identified as a new national economic pillar. Based on the successful pilot of forest tourism in NFPs, the CSFA identified that forest tourism was an effective method for diversification and comprehensive utilization of state-owned forest farms (Xu, 1993). As such, forest

1 farms were transitioned into NFPs, with construction considered a labor-intensive and
2 green industry, with low investment and direct community benefits (Gao, 1993: 10).
3 As a result of this recognition a further 136 NFPs were approved by CSFA at the end
4 of 1992. In addition, Zhangjiajie NFP was designated into the list of World Natural
5 Heritage Sites, which further stimulated the transformation of stated-owned forest
6 farms into NFPs.
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11 By 1998 domestic and international tourism was reinforced as one of the
12 cornerstones of the national economy; as emphasized by the implementation of the
13 two-day weekend in 1995 and the Golden Week¹ in 2000. During the period of
14 1992–2001 the number of international visitors to China increased from 38 million in
15 1992 to 89 million in 2001, with estimated revenue of US\$3.95 billion to US\$17.79
16 billion for inbound tourism (CNTA, 2014). In addition, domestic tourism increased
17 from an estimated US\$25–350 billion, with tourism as a percentage of GDP
18 increasing from 0.94% to 5.2% (CNTA, 2014). NFPs rapidly emerged as one of the
19 most popular tourism attractions in China, leading to a number of physical as well as
20 perceptual impacts. For instance, in 1998 UNESCO pointed out that Zhangjiajie NFP:

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22 “...has become a surrounded island between agricultural production and rapidly
23 developing tourism, where the tourist facilities [have] developed in an
24 uncontrolled manner. Whether it has done harm to bio-diversification is
25 unknown. But the influence on the aesthetic value is obvious.” (UNESCO, 1998,
26 n.p.)
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29 This criticism from UNESCO led to the conclusion that the emphasis on the
30 economic benefits should not come at the expense of ecology and society (Xu, 1993).
31 Specific criticism was centered on the flood of the Yangtze River Basin, driven by
32 long-term deforestation in the upper and middle Yangtze River. These events led to a
33 shift, with NFPs designated to provide environmental and social benefits (especially
34 in protecting endangered species and preserving unique culture and heritage) in
35 addition to the economic benefits that were already evident.
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38 During the second policy cycle there was a movement to formulate and improve
39 laws and regulations regarding the production of space for and within NFPs.
40 Consequently, the Forest Park Management Office was established, including a
41 branch designed to manage tourism and its associated development. Policy directives
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¹ The Golden Week is a collection of three national holidays – including the Spring Festival, Labor Day (1 May) and National Day (1 October) – within seven days by combining them with well-placed weekends. They have become China’s three busiest holidays, commencing in 1999, and have made changes to two holidays with the abolishment of Labor Day in 2008.

created an institutional framework, standardizing the approval procedure to meet the requirements of forest tourism and provide guidelines for the production and design of NFPs.

4.4. Policy cycle 3: Capital's acceleration and regulation strengthened by the state (2002–2011)

In 2002 the report of the 16th NCCPC concluded that the concept of “sustainable development” should be implemented. Core to this goal was improving the ecological environment and the efficiency of resource utilization, as well as increasing the connection between humans and nature (CCCPC, 2002). Subsequently, during policy cycle 3 forestry policy shifted towards “sustainable development” and “ecological construction” (CCCPC, 2003). This led to a decline in traditional timber production and an ecological focus to support the growth of domestic and international visitors, as well as other core development functions (Zhou, 2005). Clear regulatory guidelines were set up to regulate the approval and management of building, cancelling, merging and changing the scope of business and subordinate relationships for NFPs and the regulation of NFPs, including a code for the Master Planning of NFPs.

In 2007 the concept of “ecological civilization”² was integrated into the policy sphere to inform industrial structure, economic growth and consumption mode, with a specific focus on energy reduction and resources saving (CPCCC, 2007a). NFPs were mandated to provide economic, environmental and socio-cultural benefits for local communities in China (Jia, 2006). Tourism was anchored heavily towards this initiative, with capital investment into NFPs encouraged to cater for domestic and international visitors. For instance, a private investment firm spent US\$150 million to develop infrastructure to support visitation to Tianmenshan NFP in Hunan province. Although privately-funded, development assisted in meeting the demands of increased visitation; however, it also led to adverse impacts on the environment, such as a loss of unique flora and fauna, as well as negative impacts on landscapes (Luo and Zhong, 2014: 20).

To mitigate this issue China designated two “forest tourism experimental demonstration zones” in Wenzhou (2010) and Hainan (2011) (CSFA, 2012). The purpose of these two key zones was to explore and encourage innovation in

² Ecological cultivation refers to the cultural ethics forms initiated by the harmonious co-existence, virtuous cycle, comprehensive development, and continued prosperity between man and nature, man and man, and man and society (CPCCC, 2007a).

development models, management systems and operating mechanisms, and to create best practice guidelines surrounding the production of space for forest tourism. In 2012 a cooperation framework agreement on promoting the development of forest tourism signed by the CSFA represented a historic step in cooperation designed to jointly promote forest tourism development and ecological civilization (CSFA, 2012).

4.5. *Future prospects: Intersection of the state, capital and society (2012–present)*

In 2012 the 18th NCCPC reiterated the construction of an ecological civilization as the long-term plan, concerned with the well-being of the people and the nation's future (CCCPC, 2012). Environmental issues, such as smog, became an increasing concern for the public, with an improvement in the standard of living leading to a shift in public attention towards the environment. Indeed, the public's desire to enhance China's environment became a catalyst for the CPC to adjust policy towards: "...strengthening the construction of ecological civilization and environmental protection, and promoting [a] green and carbon lifestyle just as an economic issue. There are a lot of politics" (CCCPC, 2014: n.p.).

This policy shift has potential implications for the production of NFPs, particularly in relation to their ecology and well-being (Zhao, 2013). NFPs have now emerged as the platform to build an ecological civilization to enrich the lives of Chinese people. Furthermore, the China-specific national park system is currently in the preliminary stages of development, underpinned by principles of "national ownership, universal access and safeguarding ecology for future generations to enjoy and experience" (CCCPC, 2013: n.p.).

5. Discussion

Previous literature has identified that the production of space can play a significant role in shaping the character of capitalist and socialist society (McGee, 2009; Nguyen and Locke, 2014; Su and Teo, 2008; Ye et al., 2014). This study has identified that the concept of space is no longer a static platform of social relations, but embraces constitutive dimensions, which are historically produced, reconfigured and transformed. Consequently, this research found that NFPs are both an outcome of social, political, economic and ecological processes, and a medium facilitating the interplay between the state, capital and society. This research unearthed that the interaction between the state, capital and society plays an important role in the

1 production of space for tourism within NFPs. However, this research also revealed
2 differences exist in the role that the state, capital and society play in China.

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4 The representation of space was analyzed using policy documents (Buser, 2012;
5 Frisvoll, 2012; Hansen, 2013; Leary, 2013; Lefebvre, 1991; Nguyen and Locke, 2014).
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7 Indeed, with the gradual adjustment to national development strategies this research
8 found that forestry development strategies for NFPs transformed and continually
9 created “idealized conceptions of spatial order” (Harms, 2011: 238). Key words
10 derived from the ideology for NFPs covered wood harvesting, economic
11 diversification, modern forestry, ecological cultivation, well-being and conservation.
12
13 Results of this research supported the connotation that tourism development is an
14 essentially political concept, which will have a substantial impact on the production of
15 space as being reductive in its practice (Hall, 1998; Hansen, 2013; Lefebvre, 2003;
16 Roth, 2008). In addition, this research identified that institutional change in NFPs
17 mirrors that national parks are not “pure” nature (Mels, 2002), but rather the result of
18 a complex interaction between the state, capital and society driven by institutional
19 shifts in policy at a national level. Similar research has identified that forests are
20 transitioned from the primacy of wood harvesting to sustainable development,
21 including tourism, biological diversity and environmental education in Australia
22 (Dargavel, 1998), Korea (Bae et al., 2012), Thailand (Roth, 2008) and Mexico
23 (Klooster, 2003). In addition, there exists differences in the driving forces behind
24 forest transition, for instance, findings of this research demonstrate that NFPs are
25 jointly shaped by the state, capital and society with different roles played in each of
26 the policy cycles.

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28 This research discovered that tourism within NFPs was initially conceived as a
29 tool for modernization and economic growth in the 1980s, and then gradually added
30 to a multi-value image with conservation, education, enjoyment, health and political
31 benefits for visitors and surrounding communities. Extant knowledge also supports
32 the role of parks in economic and ecological aspects in urban and rural development
33 (Buser, 2012; Frisvoll, 2012; Halfacree et al., 2004; Moyle & Weiler, 2016; Roth,
34 2008). In addition, the role of tourism in national parks has evolved in other nations
35 following a similar pattern to that in China. For instance, tourism as a core economic
36 driver is similar to the initial development of Canadian National Parks (Eagles and
37 McCool, 2002; Frost and Hall, 2009), which have been regulated by the central
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government to meet the increasing demand of tourism. However, the production of space is different from that used in the United States for wilderness, conservation, education, enjoyment and spiritual purposes (Eagles and McCool, 2002; Frost and Hall, 2009), and other European countries (e.g. Sweden) for unity and patriotism (Mels, 2002).

Previous research has found that forest transition is confirmed by a major driving force, for instance government-led reforestation policy (Dargavel, 1998; Bae et al., 2012), the inflow of capital (Gotham, 2002, Leary, 2013; Yrigoy, 2014), and local socioeconomic change (Klooster, 2003; Roth, 2008). In China the official spatiality of NFPs is shaped by the interaction between the state, capital and society. According to the Constitution of the CPC, it is “the core of leadership for the cause of socialism with Chinese characteristics” and represents “the fundamental interests of the overwhelming majority of the Chinese people” (CCCPC, 2007b: n.p.). Thus, as the representative of the people authorized by the Constitution, the CPC introduced the concept of NFPs to meet the needs of society’s economic development in the early 1980s.

Due to the relatively low influence of capital, the state as a major investor constructed a large number of tourism facilities in piloted NFPs in China; in turn, the increasing revenue from these NFPs stimulated the state to establish more NFPs. This reflects the characteristics of top-down state control in socialist countries under a planned economy. The CPC constructed a socialist market economy in the 1990s due to the realization that the market plays a fundamental role in resource allocation. Following this, the state strengthened NFPs as an important asset to develop the regional economy under its fiscal policy. Although capital not only produced a variety of tourist attractions and infrastructure in NFPs, the state and capital changed the materiality of the environment and the appropriation of sites depended by local people by the physical interventions in NFPs (Buser, 2012; Gottdiener, 1993; Hansen, 2013; Roth, 2008; Su & Teo, 2008). International organizations, for instance, UNESCO, played a positive role in conservation in NFPs acknowledged by the state to regulate the capital. Generally, due to the risk of capital over accumulation in NFPs encouraging unstable social and political relations, the state is important in regulating the economic and political systems in order to mitigate potential negative impacts (Bramwell, 2011; Roth, 2008).

1 Ultimately, the interaction between the state, capital and society improved the
2 knowledge of locals on the benefits of NFPs. Previous research demonstrates that
3 institutions selected by the state continually modify and even routinely overlook the
4 rights of society (Roth, 2008), for instance the aesthetic, healthy, ecological and
5 economic value of the forest (Balassiano, 2011; Roth, 2008; Ye et al., 2014). The
6 spatial conflict often emerges between the objective for the conservation of ecological
7 sites and the subjective space of local society (Hansen, 2013). A struggle for rights
8 can be the source of transformation (Frisvoll, 2012; Hossain, 2012; McLennan et al.,
9 2014) that produces a space which can be used to support sectors, such as tourism,
10 and provide benefits to adjacent communities (Su and Teo, 2008).

11 Consequently, (as seen in Figure 2) the interplay between the state, capital and
12 society in NFPs in China could be divided into three stages. From 1982 to 1991, the
13 state not only gained the economic benefits by establishing NFPs, but made vast
14 investment to construct the infrastructure in NFPs in China. The society however was
15 not independent from the state. From 1992 to 2001, NFPs became the platform
16 between the state and the capital, due to the role of capital as one of important
17 methods of resource allocation in the economy. Following this, the capital
18 over-accumulation in NFPs was found to have a negative impact on the environment
19 and culture and encouraged unstable social and political relations between the state,
20 society and capital. Likewise, the capitalist modernization of NFPs not only
21 accelerated the accumulation of capital as an economic apparatus but also improved
22 the understanding of forestry use and conservation from the perspective of the state
23 and society.

24 After 2002, society gradually separated from and reshaped the state, which
25 incrementally adjusted to provide people increased access to public space, such as
26 NFPs, with environmental education and conservation core principles underpinning
27 development. In addition, the increasing demands from society stimulated the
28 development of infrastructure and services in NFPs, ensuring products provided
29 societal benefits (Moyle, Weiler & Moore, 2014). Figure 2 summarizes a three-phased
30 conceptual triad reflecting the shift in the state, capital and society in NFPs in China
31 from 1982 to 2014.

32 <INSERT FIGURE 2 ABOUT HERE>

Existing research on the production of space primarily documents the characteristics that exist at a certain point in time. As seen in Figure 2, the longitudinal assessment presents a core contribution to extant knowledge Hansen (2013, Lefebvre (1991) and Roth (2008) find that market-based modernization and economic growth strategies view land as a commodity, rather than as a social-ecological resource for livelihood generation. Buser (2012) suggests that “lived space” is indicative of a post-political condition where hegemonic vision, discourse and ideology deny a robust local democracy. In essence, NFPs are both an outcome of and a medium with the capacity to influence social, political, economic and ecological processes.

6. Conclusions

This research found the production of space for tourism within NFPs as abstract, enmeshed in a regime of highly-specific conceptions of the role of the state, capital and society. These conceptions have the potential to distract from gaining a deep understanding of the multifarious natural and cultural phenomena of NFPs, specifically the complex interplay between the state, capital and society identified in this paper. By examining shifts over three different policy cycles this research found that forests in China were initially used for pragmatic interests, such as logging, to sustain regional economies. However, over time more sustainable policies were implemented, with the influence of the state, society and capital fluctuating over different periods at the national level. Importantly, this research discovered that the state, capital and society provide a theoretical lens through which to explore the role of institutions in the production of NFPs driven by tourism, especially over a longitudinal time period.

At a theoretical level this paper demonstrates how the state, capital and society interact to shape the spatiality of NFPs in China from a planned economy to state-controlled capitalism. However, the strength of the contribution of knowledge is the rich, descriptive case study of how institutions have shaped the production of space for nature based tourism in China. The state introduced the ideological concept of NFPs through policy documents to create the spatial imagery for capital and society in NFPs. Concomitantly, this paradigm shift produced a combination of economic, ecological, social and political benefits. Previous studies have found that spatial conflicts emerge through tensions between the subjective space of the actors from

society and capital. In this body of work the objective space of landscape conservation is controlled by the state through developing policy based on democracy, equality and social justice.

In the case of this research, capital in NFPs accelerated the separation of state and society. Meanwhile, knowledge produced as a result of the interaction between the state, capital and society resulted in society playing a fundamental role in the production of NFPs, becoming a pillar in the spatial triad (see Figure 2.). This research found that institutional change mirrors the production of NFPs driven by tourism. This is especially true for the initial conceptualization as an ideological space in national development for the control of capital and society, to being an instrument to balance the power relationship between capital and society introduced by the state. Thus, a key contribution of this research is that the process and characteristics of the production of NFPs from state, capital and society are de-structured in a Chinese context.

In practice, capital not only creates new spaces or landscapes for the public but has the potential to simultaneously damage the natural environment and ecological system. With societal demands increasing and diversifying, the capacity of negotiation and resistance to the state and capital is increasing. Thus, all levels of government should maintain a balance between the state, capital and society in producing NFPs. In addition, all stakeholders should be consulted during the process of planning and implementing related laws and regulations to control the scope of capital in NFPs, as gatekeepers for common resources in the long-term.

Future research is needed on the relationship between the state, capital and society at the micro-level. In particular, future inquiry should be directed towards state spatiality, specifically how space is actively produced and transformed through socio-political struggles at various geographical scales. Such studies should consider how the rights of society have been impacted by the development of national forest parks. In addition, protected areas are affected by different actions from the state, capital and society. In China, marketization and globalization have accelerated the decentralization of the government. Thus, methods used by different governments to stimulate national and regional economic growth also require further research. Finally, this manuscript did not assess if the development of other networks of protected areas influenced national level policy and development for tourism. As such, future research in this space would also add considerable value to the literature.

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Fig. 1. Development of national forest parks in China from 1982-2014

Source: CSFA (2015).

Note: NCCPC refers to the National Congress of Communist Party of China.

Fig. 2. Conceptual triad reflecting shift in the state, capital and society in NFPs from 1982 to 2014.

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Table 1
The classification system for national parks in China

Type	Number	Administered by
National Forest Park	791	State Forestry Administration
National Nature Reserve	407	State Forestry Administration
National Geopark	240	Ministry of Land Resources
National Wetland Park	298	State Forestry Administration
National Mining Park	72	Ministry of Land Resources
National Marine Park	28	State Oceanic Administration
National Historic and Interest Area	225	Ministry of Housing & Urban-Rural Development
National Water Reserve Park	658	Ministry of water Resources
Total	2708*	

*Data is available from the administration websites until the end of 2014

Table 2

A timeline of related forestry or tourism policy from CPC in China

Year	Document name	Information source	Key words for economy, forest park and tourism
1978	3 rd plenary session of the 11 th CCCPC	CCCPC	The key points of the party should be shifted to the socialism modernization building.
1980	Instructions about developing afforestation	CCCPC & TSC	Forestry is a very weak sector in national economy, facing ecological and economic crisis. The party should depend on forestry and make diversification economy for forestry production.
1981	Several decisions on forest conservation and forestry development	CCCPC	Forestry is an important part of national economy. Forest preservation and forestry development is an urgent strategy.
1981	Notice on agreement and forwarding with the working report to strengthen scenic and historic conservation	TSC	Conservation and management of scenic and historic attractions could richen the cultural life for the people, promote the development of tourism cause, and service four modernizations.
1982	Ceremony report of 12 th NCCPC	CCCPC	The total task for CPC is to gradually realize the modernization of agriculture, military, science and technology and build the country into a highly civilized and democratic socialist state.
1987	Ceremony report of 13 th NCCPC	CCCPC	The party clearly put forward the basic path for socialism at a primary level, which is ‘one central task, two basic points’.
1992	Ceremony report of 14 th NCCPC	CCCPC	The party should develop the socialist market economy, give priority to develop the productivity and focus on the economic building to promote the social all-way progress.
1992	Decisions on developing the third industry	CCCPC & TSC	Tourism industry is considered as one of the third industries with low investment, fast efficiency, good profits, large employment and firm connection with the peoples’ lives.
1995	5 th plenary session of the 14 th CCCPC	CCCPC	Tourism industry is ranked number one in emerging industries, which are also first put forward.
1997	Ceremony report of 15 th NCCPC	CCCPC	The sustainable development strategy is also first proposed by the CPC.
2001	Notice on accelerating the development	TSC	The party should promote the tourism industry as a new growth point in national economy.

2002	of tourism industry Ceremony report of 16 th NCCPC	CCCPC	The party must give top priority to sustainable development, help the whole nation see the importance of environmental protection and do a good job of ecological conservation and improvement.
2003	Decisions on accelerating forestry development	CCCPC & TSC	Forestry is an important public service and a preliminary industry. We should develop new emerging products and industries (including ecotourism), and raise growth points for forestry economy.
2007	Ceremony report of 17 th NCCPC	CCCPC	The party must promote the ecological cultivation by basically forming an energy and resource efficient and environmentally friendly structure of industries, pattern of growth and mode of consumption.
2009	Notice on accelerating the development of tourism industry	TSC	Tourism industry should be brought up to the strategic keystone industry and the modern service industry satisfied by the people.
2012	Ceremony report of 18 th NCCPC	CCCPC	The party must give high priority to making ecological civilization and incorporate it into all aspects and the whole process of advancing economic, political, cultural, and social progress.
2013	3 rd plenary session of the 18 th CCCPC	CCCPC	The party should speed-up the building of ecological civilization system and have a trail on the building of national park system.
2013	Several notices on accelerating the reform and opening up for tourism industry	TSC	Tourism industry is an important part of modern service industries, which plays a dramatic role in economic growth, environmental improvement, the well-being of people and the practice of core socialist values.

*Data is available from <http://cpc.people.com.cn>.

Table 3

Key national forest pilot parks listed

Name	Year established for FP	Year established for NFP	Province	Distinct Features
Zhangjiajie	-	1982	Hunan	Geological landscape
Qiaodaohu	1986	1990	Zhejiang	Water landscape
Tiantong	1982	1997	Zhejiang	Forest and Buddhism landscape
Shatoujiao	-	1989	Guangdong	Seaside evergreen broad-leaf forest landscape
Liuxihe	1983	1993	Guandong	Hot spring landscape
Louguantai	1982	1992	Shaanxi	Canyon forest landscape
Taishan	1985	1992	Shandong	Cultural landscape
Weihai	1985	1992	Shandong	Seaside forest landscape
Langyashan	1985	1992	Anhui	Cultural landscape
Songshan	1986	1988	Henai	Temple landscape

*Data is available from China Forest Yearbook (1982-1994).