

Looking for causality in civilised tourism in China

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ABSTRACT

The paper outlines the processes in carrying out a realist analysis of civilised tourism in China and the author's thoughts on what kind(s) of causality that the critical realism paradigm can equipt realist researchers in their effort to find explanations for social phenomena under investigation. It also discusses the challenges in identifying the mechanisms, giving rise to issues around the complexity of causality.

The empirical investigation aims to answer:

1. What structural and agential mechanisms bring about the emergence of socio-cultural elaborations in civilised tourism in China;
2. What cultural mechanisms derived from the structural properties of civilised tourism exist (independent of agents' identification) that may shape the social and intellectual movement of civilised tourism.

To fulfil research aim 1, the objectives are set as below:

- I. To understand the interests of collectivities of the agents in their respective social roles;
- II. To identify the variations of Socio-Cultural interactions (if any);
- III. To examine the gelness of the variations with the ideation of civilised tourism at the collective level;
- IV. To explain how the mechanisms that derived from the properties of structure and agency bring about the manifestation of Socio-Cultural interactions.

To fulfil research aim 2, the objectives are set as below:

- V. To describe the "sayings" of civilised tourism in the cultural system.
- VI. To identify the structural properties of civilised tourism and their situational logics.
- VII. To explain how these properties and their situational logics might have functioned to bring about the manifestation of civilised tourism.

The investigation involved three key blocks of knowledge production:

- Block A focused on the empirical domain i.e. events experienced by sampled social actors;
- Block B focused on the actual domain i.e. the events that may or may not be experienced by them but somehow may have influenced their lived experience;
- Block C took the burden of retroductive reasoning (Danermark, Ekström & Karlsson, 2019), dealing with the transcendental task of moving from events (i.e. the empirical and actual domains) to things with causal powers (i.e. the real domain).

Block A involved a purposive, snowball sampling strategy with the use of semi-structured interviews to understand the values that people hold about themselves and their interactions with other people and the social settings. Participants were recruited in Dalian (in north east of China), Yinchuan (in north west of China), Shanghai (on the east coast of China), Guilin and Nanning (in the south of China). These locations were selected because they are popular tourist destinations. Three sets of interview questions were developed according to the (primary) social role of the subjects as seen by the research team. In total, 17 one-to-one interviews, five focus groups (the group size ranged from 3 to 4) and three group interviews (the sizes of which were 10, 21 and 32) were conducted between 2017 and 2019. Interviews were audio recorded and transcribed verbatim. The length of the interviews ranged between 30 and 90 minutes.

Block B involved the use of covert observation of signages and posters in public places and tourist attractions and overt observation of the business settings of two tourism companies (one international hotel located in Dalian and one Chinese travel agency in Guilin). The researchers also visited various sites in six Chinese cities and regions between 2018 and 2019. The process generated 138 images/photos. Through the observations, two demi-regularities (Fletcher, 2017) are identified, namely a national promotion of 12 socialist core values and an advocacy of civilised tourism with an emphasis on tourist civility. The values are prosperity, democracy, civility, harmony, freedom, equality, justice, rule of law, patriotism, dedication, integrity, and friendship. These observations facilitated the identification of two demi-regularities (Fletcher, 2017), which subsequently informed a further procedure that seeks to understand the discourses of the ideas at the cultural system level (i.e. their systemic “sayings”). “社会主义价值观” (socialist core values) was used to find relevant academic articles published between 2012 and 2018 in China’s national database of literature. This search generated 1265 academic articles, among which 24 papers were selected for further analysis based on their titles and abstracts that suggest a focus on “文明” (civility or civilisation), “文明旅游” (civilised tourism), “游客文明素质” and “旅游素质” (tourist civility). These keywords were entered in the built-in search engine of the Ministry of Culture and Tourism website to search relevant publications between 2019 and 2020. The search identified five items. In total, 29 articles were imported to NVivo for data analysis.

Block C takes the burden of discovering (1) what innate properties cause the outcome, and (2) how the casual relations themselves unfold. The first concern was addressed through a categorisation strategy that involves use of framework analysis (Ritchie & Lewis, 2003) on 25 interview scripts. The analysis followed the steps of familiarisation, identifying a thematic framework, indexing, charting, mapping and interpretation. The same method and summative

content analysis (Hsieh & Shannon, 2005) were applied to the identified 29 articles on civilised tourism and tourist civility and the collection of 138 images/photos. The second concern was addressed through a connecting strategy with the use of listening guide (Gilligan, Spencer, Weinberg & Bertsch, 2009) in interview scripts whilst critical discourse analysis (Bergström, Ekström & Boréus, 2017; Fairclough, 2010; Potter, 2009) and multimodal discourse analysis (Björkvall, 2017; Wallace, 2010) were used in the analysis of the selected articles and images/photos.

The key findings are:

- The workings of structural properties, the historical cultural ideations of Confucian philosophy, and the present social movement of civility and civilised tourism development co-create a condition for agencies to suffice - triggering psychological and social causes.
- The causations are engineered by agents' capabilities of recognising their concerns, reflexive and evaluative reasoning, forging of identity, moral engagement, and learning.
- Five situational logics, which function to co-determine the saying of civilised tourism in the cultural system, are identified.

The project concludes that

- Sampled Chinese social actors gel well with the ideation of civilised tourism, which effectively sustains the existing system's configuration, and that the variations in socio-cultural interactions identified, on the other hand, potentially result in Archer's morphogenesis of contingent complementarity.
- The call for civilised tourism in China provides a condition for ethicality formation to take place in tourism, which is not reducible to tourism, nor present stakeholders. The formation is conditioned by the product of past socio-cultural interactions whilst engineered by the protective and corrective situational logics of the idealizations taking place in the present time.

As stated in Li (2021), the challenges in conducting a realist research run through the research process of abduction, data analysis, and retroduction. Realist inquiry naturally invites an interdisciplinary approach. Thus, one critical challenge is to incorporate relevant concepts from different disciplines in such a manner that they speak well with the ontological foundation of critical realism. The challenges in data analysis have been concerned with coding struggles and identifying causal properties of the elements in question. The struggles are reflected in deciding code that categorises evidence or one that labels the connection between events. How can the coding process help the researcher to identify causal properties? Once they are identified, how to tell the "story" about the mechanisms (i.e. retroduction)? According to Danermark et al. (2019, 117), by this mode of inference, "what is basically characteristic and constitutive of ... structures" can be arrived at. Resembling deduction, induction, and abduction, "we can move from knowledge of one thing to knowledge of something else". Would such a story be accepted or understood by a reader or a reviewer who does not accept the ontological existence of realist mechanism?

These challenges echo only the tip of the iceberg of realist complexity of causality from the

perspective of a social science researcher. Reflecting upon the research approach taken in this project, the critical realism paradigm proves to be a fruitful way of developing scientific knowledge (e.g. Li, 2022). Critical realism's stratified ontology is a robust underlabourer allowing researchers tracking down the real from the empirical and actual domains while avoiding ontological conflation. Archer's SAC trilogy provides a practical and comprehensive framework for efforts that seek to discover the casualties stemming from the real of structure, action, and culture. Lawson's (2019, 2021) and Porpora's (1998) work further contribute to our understanding of properties of structural system and relations in social exchange.

Thus, it is logical to say: causality is complex and this complexity is heterogeneous. Existing social theories by, for example, Archer (1995, 2000, 2008), Lawson (2019, 2021), Porpora (2019, 2021), help researchers unpack social phenomena under investigation. The journey to find the mechanisms will require further engagement with previous work in other disciplines. For example, Li (under review) incorporated Archer's work on agency and Bandura's social cognitive moral theory. Such an incorporation was helpful in discovering agential properties that have permitted the emergence of four moral reasoning processes. Therefore, causality in social sciences is bound to be heterogeneous and complex. The kind(s) of causality and the extent that causality is complex are to unfold as more realist researchers make their journeys to seek underlying mechanisms of social phenomena.

Data linking: Li, Li (2021) Resource list on civility and civilized tourism. BathSPAdata. Dataset. <https://doi.org/10.17870/bathspa.16997170.v1>

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