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Media-induced voluntourism in Yunnan, China

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Abstract

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Keywords

yunnan, media, induced, voluntourism, china

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MEDIA-INDUCED VOLUNTOURISM IN YUNNAN, CHINA

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ABSTRACT

Media-induced tourism as well as voluntourism are topics increasingly investigated in the tourism literature. However, a discussion of the intersection of these two forms of tourism, i.e. media-induced voluntourism, is currently missing from the literature. Using the example of two Chinese TV dramas, this paper seeks to shed light on motivations and activities of media-induced voluntourists to the Chinese province of Yunnan. Based on a thematic analysis of online postings of the fans of these Chinese TV dramas, the paper finds empirical evidence for media-induced voluntourism. The findings reveal that fans travel to Yunnan not only to engage in altruistic behavior, but also to inspect the volunteer work of other fans, as well as to receive recognition from the community. General tourism activities also play a role in their travels. The results indicate that fans' voluntourism was strongly motivated by their empathy for the TV dramas' characters and their desire to live the values promoted in these dramas.

Keywords: Cyberfandom, TV Drama, Volunteering, Motivations, Tourism

MEDIA-INDUCED VOLUNTOURISM IN YUNNAN, CHINA

INTRODUCTION

Inspired by recent TV dramas, more and more Chinese fans use online communities to develop social movements, especially volunteering programs aimed at promoting the spirit embodied in their favorite TV dramas. As part of their volunteering efforts, they also travel to the destinations connected with the TV dramas. These destinations can be locations where the dramas were filmed or where events portrayed in the dramas actually happened. In both cases, these locations are typically in very poor, rural China and, because of their remoteness, they are off the beaten tourist path. Both voluntourism and media-induced tourism are seen as important drivers of economic development in rural areas (Christopherson, 2010; Castro, Marola & Corti, 2010; O'Connor, Bolan & Crossan, 2006); as such, media-induced voluntourism has the potential to create positive impacts on local economies. However, little is known about the mindset and actual activities of media-induced voluntourists. Previous studies reveal that while media-induced tourists are often motivated by fantasy; voluntourists seek instead to mitigate harsh realities, such as poverty or the impacts of natural disasters. How these two dimensions are negotiated by media-induced voluntourists is unclear.

This paper explores the phenomenon of media-induced voluntourism among fans of two very popular TV dramas in China, *Soldier Sortie* (SS) and *My Chief and My Regiment* (MCMR), by examining fans' online conversations. It seems that in China volunteering programs initiated by fans of these two TV dramas have taken on an important role in propelling the development of tourist destinations in the province of Yunnan. The study aims at investigating both the motivations as well as specific behaviors of media-induced voluntourists. Such an investigation is important as the connection between media-induced tourism and voluntourism is currently not

discussed in the literature (Shao & Gretzel, 2009). Further, media-induced voluntourism has the capacity to influence not only economic development but also social aspects of local communities and, therefore, its characteristics and potential impacts need to be understood.

BACKGROUND

Motives of Media-Induced Travelers

Beeton (2005:4) defines ‘film-induced tourism’ as the “on-location tourism that follows the success of a movie (or set), television program, video or DVD in a particular region”. More specific definitions include ‘movie-induced’ tourism, people seeking sights/sites seen on the silver screen (Riley & Van Doren, 1992; Riley, 1994; Riley, Baker & Van Doren, 1998; Im, Chon, Peters & Weiermair, 1999), as well as ‘television-induced’ tourism (Butler, 1990). The broadest definition refers to the phenomenon as ‘media-induced’ tourism. Nielsen (2001) conceptualizes media-induced tourism as influences of mass media on travelers’ trip planning and decision-making processes through more than film, television, and traditional literary formats (e.g. books, journals etc.), including radio, government reports and other communication platforms. The current study focuses on the influence of television programs in tandem with online fan culture or ‘cyber-fandom’ (Costello, 1999). . Therefore, Nielsen’s (2001) broader notion of media-induced tourism is adopted for this study.

Existing research which has sought to align the motives of media-induced tourists with the personal seeking dimension of Iso-Ahola’s (1982) model of tourism motivation (Singh & Best, 2004) may also be applicable in the context of this study. Based on the research of Kim, Agrusa, Lee and Chon (2007) and Lee, Scott and Kim (2008), it is proposed that people’s involvement with a TV drama affects their perceptions of tourism destinations (familiarity,

image, and visitation intentions). Kim et al. (2007) found that empathy with actors or actresses contributed to Japanese viewers' preferences for and involvement in Korean dramas, and their desires to visit Korean locations associated with these dramas. In contrast, Kim and Richardson (2003) found a link between the viewing of a film and desires to visit the destination, but did not find the relationship to be mediated by empathy with film characters.

More recent research studies have begun to question the actual contribution of media in creating strong motivations for travel and tourism. For instance, a survey conducted by Macionis and Sparks (2009) found that of the people who like watching films and travelling, only 4 percent of the total respondents claimed the main reason for travel had been film related, while most just happened to visit a film location in the course of a trip motivated by other factors. Following this study, media-induced tourism can be seen as an incidental tourist activity. Di Cesare, D'Angelo and Rech (2009) investigated different phases of the decision-making process starting with a desire to travel induced by films, searching for information about places seen in films, having or changing destination images and perceptions, choosing the travel destination, and finally purchasing a tourist product. Although they confirmed a strong influence of film viewing on the desire to travel, the influence gradually weakens as the decision process goes on. Additionally, previous research has yet to examine how the themes and concepts portrayed in media (e.g. TV dramas) induce certain feelings that lead to travel.

Shao and Gretzel (2009) found emotional involvement in a drama leads to strong desires to visit the place where the story really happened, and that during their travels, fans often engage in meaningful activities such as volunteering and self-reflection. This suggests that for some fans, volunteering could be a strong motivation for travel to the filming or actual location. The current study further explores this connection between media consumption and travel motives.

Motives of Voluntourists

Volunteer tourism or *voluntourism* has been defined as “utilizing discretionary time and income to travel out of the sphere of regular activity to assist others in need” (McGehee & Santos, 2005:760). Wearing and Neil (2001:1) describe activities undertaken by ‘voluntourists’ as involving “aiding or alleviating the material poverty of some groups in society, the restoration of certain environments or research into aspects of society or environment.” Zahra and McIntosh (2007) and Mustonen (2006) claim that voluntourists are differentiated from other tourists in that their primary and most significant motivation is altruism rather than escapist tourist motives. Brown and Morrison (2003) mention that the only requirement of many voluntourism providers is that their clients need to have the desire to help other people. On the other hand, previous research suggests that altruism may not be the primary motive of voluntourists because they are not only volunteers but also tourists. Like volunteers, voluntourists may be motivated by altruistic reasons. However, like tourists, voluntourists may also be motivated by the search for pleasure, adventure, and meeting other people (Gazley, 2001). Wearing and Neil (2001) stress personal development as an important motive for voluntourists. Brown and Lehto (2005) assert that voluntourists have four main motives: cultural immersion, giving back and making a difference, seeking camaraderie with fellow volunteers, and family bonding and education. In addition, their research found that voluntourists generally expect to immerse themselves in local cultures with the hope of finding a connection with the local people.

In summary, existing research found the motives for voluntourists include both altruistic and self-related perspectives. Altruistic motives are the distinct characteristic that differentiates voluntourism from other forms of tourism, and encompass helping others in need, restoring the

environment, and helping the host people (Butcher, 2003; Scheyvens, 2007; Stoddart & Rogerson, 2004). Self-related motives involve hedonic experiences and self-development. Self-development includes contemplating, fulfilling a dream, expressing individuality, enriching oneself, developing skills relative to university studies and future careers, engaging in meaningful experiences, bonding with others while travelling, and enjoying the feeling of being part of a team (Brown & Lehto, 2005; Brown & Morrison, 2003; McGehee, 2002; McGehee & Norman, 2002; McGehee & Santos, 2005; Mustonen, 2006; Sin, 2009; Stoddart & Rogerson, 2004; Uriely, Reichel & Ron, 2003; Wearing, 2003; Wearing & Deane, 2003; Wearing & Neil, 2001).

So far, the specific motivations of media-induced voluntourists have not been researched. The question is if and how the escapist motivations of media-induced tourists are combined with the altruistic and self-development focused motivations of voluntourists, and to what behavioral consequences they lead. Also, while media-induced tourists seem to be driven by empathy for television characters, voluntourists supposedly feel empathy for local residents. How media-induced voluntourists negotiate to whom they direct their feelings of empathy has yet to be clarified through empirical research.

Media-induced Voluntourism

Scarpino's (2008) media-induced travel study on the American television show *One Tree Hill* discussed fans' online conversations and participation in the show's annual charity basketball game, which continues to spur large numbers of fans to travel to Wilmington, North Carolina, USA (Hotz, 2008). The fans of the U.S. TV drama *Lost* traveled to 'Lost Weekend' parties, during which money for charities endorsed by the cast & crew was raised (see <http://lost->

radio.com/lostweekend/). Additionally, Shao and Gretzel (2009) found *My Chief and My Regiment* fans traveled to Tengchong in Yunnan, China for volunteering purposes. Given these initial hints at fan-based volunteer travel but lack of literature on media-induced voluntourism, this paper seeks to fill this gap by finding more empirical evidence for the link between media-induced tourism and voluntourism.

Soldier Sortie and My Chief and My Regiment

China is known for its large scale TV series production and consumption. In 2007, the annual output of TV series reached 529 with 14,670 sets, ranking first in the world (Liu, 2008). According to the latest survey conducted by the National Bureau of Statistics of China commissioned by China Central Television, the total number of Chinese television viewers aged over four was 1.2 billion (Liao, 2007). It is worthy to note that, as online video websites become more and more popular, many viewers prefer to watch TV series online at a time convenient for them.

Both *Soldier Sortie* (SS) and *My Chief and My Regiment* (MCMR) are popular Chinese TV series produced by the same crew and broadcast in 2007 and 2009, respectively. SS is a story of a young farmer who was forced to join the army by his father, gradually became the most outstanding soldier in his regiment, and found his true self in the army. MCMR is about the Chinese National Revolutionary Army expeditionary force led by the Chinese Nationalist Party in Burma, fighting the Imperial Japanese Army during the 1942 Battle of Yunnan-Burma Road. SS won numerous prestigious television awards in both 2007 and 2008. MCMR also won several important awards and nominations in 2009 despite its airing leading to controversy in China. The controversy stems from the fact that the Chinese Nationalist Party was expelled by the

Communist Party in 1949 and that specifics of the battle were subsequently erased from history books and public memory. Veterans of the battle never received any recognition for their heroism.

The two dramas have evoked very strong emotions among Chinese viewers as they both incorporate traditional (pre-communist) Chinese values and portray an aspect of history and Chinese identity that remains largely unknown to the Chinese people. Unfortunately, before airing the government must approve Chinese TV series. To pass the test, the dramas, especially MCMR, use a number of metaphors to convey their messages. Thus, there is a great desire among fans to discuss and interpret these metaphors. Interestingly, this aspect has spurred extensive online discussions among Chinese fans serving as the basis for this research.

Cyberfandom

Modern day fan culture is participatory and provides individuals the opportunity to experience their favorite TV shows through a support-based community of peers and fans. In this sense it cultivates fan involvement through various forms of mass media (i.e., radio, television, and the Internet) (Baym, 2000; Greenwald & Leavitt, 1984; Sood, 2002). Costello (1999) describes modern fan culture as one where traditional fans are distinguished from newly emergent fans that routinely use the Internet to display their involvement with a show. Cyberfandom, a composite of “cyber” and “fandom”, is used to refer to online fan culture (Costello, 1999; Scarpino & Gretzel, 2008). Cyberfandom provides opportunities for fans to become even more immersed in fan culture by introducing a plethora of show-related websites and activities online. These activities vary by show, television network, or fan site owner/creator. Common activity platforms include online fan-based message boards, episode spoilers, musical

soundtrack downloads, games, chat, online discussion forums, etc. Jenkins' (1992) also mentions creation of fan fiction as an important cyberfan activity.

Online communities have in general been described as having the following core characteristics (Whittaker, Issacs, & O'Day, 1997: 137):

- Members have shared goals, interests, needs, or activities that provide the primary reason for belonging to the community;
- Members engage in repeated, active participation and there are often intense interactions, strong emotional ties and shared activities occurring between participants;
- Members have access to shared resources and there are policies for determining access to those resources;
- Reciprocity of information, support and services between members is important;
- There is a shared context of social conventions, language, and protocols.

In the case of cyberfandom, fans use online communities to exchange information, discuss issues, organize fan activities, and to generally engage in conversations with other like-minded individuals. Wang and Fesenmaier (2006) discuss online communities as an important communication channel in tourism fulfilling functional as well as psychological and social needs. Scarpino and Gretzel (2008) found that online communities are extensively used in the context of media-induced tourism as fans share stories about their trips and plan media-induced travel using online forums as a platform to aide information search and decision-making processes.

The Online Communities of SS and MCMR

The popularity of SS and MCMR has in part manifested itself through the scale of the online communities of these two TV series. Using Baidu China, SS fans created a forum in 2007,

becoming the largest TV-themed online community in China. As of April 21, 2010, the number of SS forum members in Baidu China had reached 29,606. Following the conclusion of SS, the playwright, director and most of the actors shifted over to create MCMR, resulting in followers of SS joining the MCMR forum before its official launch, while new MCMR fans connected after actually watching the show. By April 21, 2010 the number of members in the MCMR forum in Baidu China was 6,000, ranking second among Chinese online TV forums.

In addition to the above forums, SS fans and MCMR fans also created or joined other sub-forums related to these two dramas. For example, the playwright, the director and many main actors in these two dramas have their own forums. Furthermore, fans also created sub-forums dedicated to discussing specific topics related to SS and MCMR. Specifically, SS created an online group called Family of Seasons in the Sun (FSS), which establish primary schools, especially in remote and poor rural regions such as rural villages in Yunnan. As most Chinese fans are familiar with *QQ*, a chatting tool provided by *Tencent* (the largest social medium in China), they also created various *QQ* groups. In general, SS fans and MCMR fans are very active in online conversations throughout these various communities, discussing issues, having virtual parties, and creating content related to these two dramas.

SS Fans and MCMR Fans

As the connection between the two dramas is quite strong, sharing the same production crew, playwright, director and ultimately fans, many sub-forums, such as the FSS forum, include fans from both TV dramas. The profile of MCMR members varies, and includes teachers, students, entrepreneurs, housewives, engineers, and the unemployed. Yet, they are united in their feelings toward the drama. One member summarizes this sentiment: “*We love MCMR, unrelated to age,*

gender, education, experience. We all like it, with no reason” (Shao & Gretzel, 2009). Similarly, an FSS member states that other members are *“from various occupations, including senior managers in enterprises, white-collars, blue-collars, and even temporary unemployed guys; teachers who serve at child care centers, elementary schools, high schools and colleges; students from babies learning to talk to graduate students. In terms of FSS members’ age, some of them are older than others by several decades”*. It is clear that both SS fans and MCMR fans encompass a broad range of individuals in terms of age, occupation and social background. The majority of fans resides in China; however, Chinese fans living in the U.S., Europe and Japan have also been active in the online fan communities.

Yunnan as the Filming Location

The Chinese province of Yunnan is used as the filming location of SS, and Tengchong, an actual battlefield in Yunnan serves as the filming location for MCMR. Yunnan is located in the far southwest region of the country bordering Myanmar (Burma), Laos, and Vietnam, and has the highest number of poverty-stricken counties among provinces in China. Among the 129 counties in Yunnan, 73 are considered national poverty counties (State Council Leading Group Office of Poverty Alleviation and Development, 2006). Tengchong County is one of these counties. According to the Statistics Bureau of Yunnan Province and the Yunnan Survey Organization of the National Bureau of Statistics of China (2010), the total population in Yunnan for 2009 was 45.71 million, however, the poverty population in rural areas in Yunnan reached 5.4 million according to the poverty standard in rural areas at annual incomes of RMB 1,196 Yuan.

As SS was mainly filmed at military camps in Yunnan, which are not open to the public, while MCMR was predominately shot in Tengchong County in Yunnan, there are more MCMR fans than SS fans traveling to Yunnan. Baoshan Daily (Dong, 2010) reported that during the Chinese Spring Festival holiday week, Feb. 13th-19th, 2010, Tengchong County received 261,500 visitors, 33.28% higher than the same period of the previous year, and occupancy of star-rated hotels reached 100%, increasing 28.82% compared to the previous year. The report mentioned the blowout of visitors was inspired by the popular TV dramas including MCMR. Shao and Gretzel (2009) also found evidence of MCMR fans traveling to Yunnan motivated by watching the TV drama.

METHODOLOGY

Research Method

Coined by Kozinets (2002), *netnography*, refers to applying anthropological techniques to cultural and community research via computer-mediated communications. Netnography serves as a methodology where information published in online forums can be used to identify and understand the needs and decisions of online consumers by allowing researchers to observe the environment and natural behaviors of their research subjects online and often in real-time (Kozinets, 2002).

Research Questions

In order to explore the volunteer activities and motivations of fans, a qualitative 'netnographic' study (Kozinets, 2002) using fans' online conversations from forums dedicated to

the volunteer efforts of SS fans and MCMR fans was conducted. Attention was paid only to those threads related to the following research questions:

- 1) What kind of volunteer activities do SS fans and MCMR fans discuss in their online conversations related to the dramas of SS and MCMR?
- 2) What kind of voluntours have they taken?
- 3) Why do they participate in volunteering activities as fans?
- 4) Do all fans who participate in volunteering activities desire to travel?
- 5) Why do they travel to the destinations rather than only volunteering through donations and fan art contributions online from home?

Data Collection

The online postings of SS and MCMR fans served as the data for this study. April 21, 2010 served as the cut-off date, and only entries posted before this date were considered.

Web Site Selection

Based on Kozinets' (2002) criteria for website selection, the following elements were acknowledged as critical in identifying suitable data sources:

- 1) Forum members discuss media-induced volunteering travel and/or tourism directly or indirectly related to SS or MCMR;
- 2) Highest "traffic" of postings related to SS or MCMR;
- 3) Large numbers of discrete message posters;
- 4) Detailed or descriptively rich data;
- 5) Between-member interactions of the type required by the research questions.

Based on the selection criteria, the Baidu Forum, Family of Seasons in the Sun (FSS forum) dedicated to discussing SS fans' volunteering activities, and the Baidu Forum, My Chief and My Regiment (MCMR forum) dedicated to MCMR fans' volunteering efforts were selected as the two online communities for this study. In order to collect all postings related to volunteering activities of MCMR fans, one of the three administrators of the MCMR forum was contacted to gain access to the restricted forum Silent (Silent forum). Silent forum is dedicated to discussing MCMR fans' activities related to helping veterans. Consequently, the Silent forum was included as the third online community analyzed for our study.

Data Extraction

In order to extract online conversations related to media-induced voluntourism, different strategies were used to select and gather data. In the case of the FSS forum, at 12:00pm on April 20, 2010, all 392 threads were extracted from the forum where the earliest thread dated October 28, 2007. Table 1 shows all threads were pre-classified by FSS forum administrators into 8 groups, namely "FSS Announcements", "FSS History", "FSS Promotion", "FSS Donation List", "Recommended Articles", "FSS Essays", "FSS Data", and "Videos and Photos". Among them, 185 threads were considered for the analysis of volunteering activities of SS fans including 35 threads of "FSS History" recording all the volunteering activities of FSS plus 130 threads of "Recommended Articles" and 20 threads of "Videos and Photos" showing further details of these activities. Another 164 threads were considered for the analysis of motives of SS fans participating in volunteering tours which include 91 threads of "FSS Essays" posted by FSS members individually talking about their stories, 33 threads of "FSS Data" and 40 threads of "FSS Promotion", containing transcripts of leading FSS members interviewed by public media.

The remaining 37 “FSS Announcements” threads and 6 “FSS Donation List” threads were only used to obtain general information about the volunteering work of FSS.

Insert Table 1 about here

For the MCMR forum, a the search engine provided by the MCMR forum was used, inputting the keyword “helping veterans”. Again using 9:30AM on April 21, 2010 as the cut-off time, 41 relevant postings with the earliest thread dated April 27, 2007 were extracted. To know if other forms of MCMR-related voluntourism existed, another search of the MCMR forum inputting the keyword “volunteer” was conducted. Using the same cut-off time, 320 relevant threads were extracted. The threads were then manually checked resulting in 13 threads related to volunteering activities of MCMR fans. The proportion of postings discussing voluntourism was very low (approx. 4.3%), possibly due to MCMR fans having other platforms under which they discuss volunteer activities, such as the Silent Forum.

In the case of the Silent Forum, a similar method was used to extract and identify relevant threads. Up to 10:30pm on April 21, 2010, there were 89 threads and the earliest thread started on August 13, 2007. These threads were pre-classified by the Silent forum administers into 3 categories, “Visiting Records” with 30 threads, “Letters and Feelings” with 14 threads and “Announcements and Donation Lists” with 45 threads. The 45 threads related to “Announcements and Donation Lists” only provided contextual information and were not included in the data analysis. So, of the 44 useable threads, 49.4% of total threads were dedicated to discussing voluntourism activities of MCMR fans. Figure 1 shows an example of a posting on the Silent Forum with a photo of a fan interacting with a Battle of Yunnan veteran.

Insert Figure 1 about here

Data Analysis

Thematic analysis, which is a form of content analysis, was applied to all relevant postings to unearth answers to the research questions. Thematic analysis (Fereday & Muir-Cochrane, 2006; Attride-Stirling, 2001; Boyatzis, 1998; Aronson, 1994) is the process of collecting, analyzing, and coding information into emergent themes (Merriam, 1998; Strauss & Corbin, 1998; Taylor & Bogdan, 1984). Thematic analysis is referred to as “a method for identifying, analyzing, and reporting patterns” (Braun & Clarke, 2006, p.76). The method is relatively flexible compared to other qualitative methodologies as it can be used both in an inductive approach and a theoretical or deductive approach (Braun & Clarke, 2006; Boyatzis, 1998). The research questions served as the initial coding framework. Each thread was coded by the initial posting and this initial coding was later confirmed through analysis of subsequent postings. The individual postings of each thread were then categorized based on different types of volunteering activities. For example, all postings describing fans’ onsite drought relief efforts were categorized under the theme of “Onsite Volunteering Work Where Crisis Happened”, while the postings related to fans’ onsite meetings were categorized under the theme of “Onsite Donations Distribution”.

The coding was completed by one of the authors who is Chinese as well as a fan of both TV dramas, and who engages in cyberfandom for both shows. As qualitative research needs the researcher to be the instrument of the study, the researcher’s immersion in the dramas and fan culture allowed for the analysis of postings from an insider perspective. The other authors then analyzed the translated coding scheme supported by exemplary postings.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

Volunteer Activities of Media-Induced Tourists

The analysis of online postings identified a variety of volunteer activities, differing somewhat between SS and MCMR fans. Therefore, SS and MCMR activities will be discussed separately before drawing general implications about the behaviors of media-induced voluntourists to Yunnan.

SS Fan Activities

Postings from the FSS forum indicate that SS fans focus mostly on donating to build schools in rural areas. Within a span of only four months after a call for donations, FSS raised RMB 250,000 (approx. \$36,500 US Dollars) to establish the first “Seasons in the Sun” Hope Primary School (SSHPS, 幸福时光希望小学) in Yunnan. In addition to direct donations, FSS members raised money through charity sales of fan art with signatures of the SS cast and FSS members. In 2009, soon after MCMR was launched, MCMR fans joined the effort to begin donating to the second SSHPS in Tengchong. Presently, SSHPS No.1 (幸福时光希望一小) has been built; No.2 (二小) is under construction; and No.3 (三小) is in the site selection stage. FSS has taken full advantage of online communication channels, such as using a dedicated QQ group to discuss issues as well as using *Sina Microblog*, a popular Chinese social medium like *Twitter*, to promote FSS. FSS is highly organized, including a program, promotion, general management, and human resource divisions, each having a specific mission. For instance, the

FSS Promotion Department is in charge of advocating SSHPS projects online by, for example, posting videos of their voluntours on popular Chinese online social networks.

From the 185 threads analyzed about volunteering activities of SS fans, it became apparent that FSS members have not only built schools, but also organized several voluntours to locations in Yunnan to interact with the children they have helped. Of the threads relating to volunteering activities about 21.6% were devoted to discussing activities of voluntours. In general, two types of voluntourism activities of FSS members were identified: onsite donations distributions at the SSHPS, and onsite volunteering work during times of crisis.

1) Onsite Donations Distribution at SSHPS

FSS members travel to rural locations to inspect sites for future SSHPS projects and to visit the already completed SSHPS. Members also mention that during the onsite inspections, it is common for FSS to deliver donations to candidate schools, such as books, stationery, electric blankets, shoes, socks, clothes, and etc. FSS members posted numerous photos in the forum connected to these inspections and donations. Figure 2 shows photos taken on trips to distribute in-kind donations in two SSHPS candidate schools.

Insert Figure 2 about here

In addition to delivering donations during the inspection phase, fans also traveled to visit the first SSHPS when it was established. FSS members feel compelled and are encouraged to see and experience the school created by their donations. Their visits to the school focused on interaction with local students rather than just giving. These trips gave FSS members the opportunity to share their time as a kind of volunteer activity, going beyond economic support

and involving caring for social wellbeing and cultural heritage. On July 19, 2009, a large group of fans visited SSHPS No. 1 in Huize County. Countless postings recorded this “*meaningful meeting (有意义的聚会)*”. Students and teachers as well as local government officers hosted a celebration party for the establishment of SSHPS No. 1 welcoming the FSS members. More than 60 FSS members participated, played and exchanged gifts with the children. What moved FSS members the most was a performance in which students reproduced the admission ceremony of the company of Steel Seven, a classic scene in SS. One fan said “*I could not help bursting into tears when I watched the familiar scene reenacted by the children (当我看到孩子们重现这一熟悉场景时，眼泪禁不住掉了下来)*”. Reenactments play an important role in the culture of SS and MCMR fans as numerous videos posted online capture fans reenacting scenes and staging plays based on fan fiction.

Interestingly, a local officer who is in charge of promotion gave each FSS member a tourist brochure entitled “Charm of Huize (《会泽魅力》)”. A female fan said she was touched by the brochure and was interested in the attractions in Huize. Almost every fan expressed their disappointment and sadness for having to leave and looked forward to their next visit. Figure 3 shows photographs posted by FSS members taken on the day of the event. It is important to note that after the group activities were over, a number of fans went to visit other attractions in Yunnan. Many of these fans discussed their travel and tourism activities after visiting SSHPS No.1 online with other members.

Insert Figure 3 about here

2) Onsite Volunteering

In addition to the voluntours to scout potential school sites and to provide donations, fans also work onsite when their help is needed. An FSS forum thread posted on March 27, 2010 reported FSS fans efforts to help during the drought disaster of Southwest China, as the SSHPS schools were also affected. When the headmaster of SSHPS No.1 turned to FSS for help, the fans organized quickly. According to a fan, “*the funding for rebuilding drinking water facilities was available in that very day!*”(饮用水设施重建所需款项于当天就已到位 !)” FSS members near the school also organized to deliver water onsite with the help of local officers of Tengchong county (Figure 4).

Insert Figure 4 about here

Other interesting facts emerged from the forum postings. First, FSS members are not limited to SS or MCMR fans. After the FSS team was awarded the title “Top 10 People Who Moved Yunnan in 2009” and was subject to considerable media exposure, many people who were not originally fans of the TV dramas joined their volunteering activities. Furthermore, FSS members’ donations were not limited to establishing schools and providing aid in Yunnan, but extended to helping other cities and provinces as well. After the earthquake in Sichuan Province, FSS members raised money to buy basic goods and went to Yingxiu Town, Sichuan Province to distribute them to residents. It is clear that FSS volunteering activities are not singular actions but continuous efforts that extend beyond the realm of the dramas themselves. FSS members have established strong connections with the SSHPS and local governments to be able to respond to specific needs quickly and with compassion.

MCMR Fan Activities

The postings from the MCMR forum and Silent forum revealed two main activities related to voluntourism, namely helping veterans and initiating a program called “Youth of China” (少年中国).

1) Helping Veterans

Different from other tourists who visit and help veterans in Tengchong, MCMR fans take great care in not disturbing the lives of veterans, preferring to assist them in a very low profile manner. One fan said: *“The old soldiers are very tired, so we should not to disturb their life although we should help them as much as we can. They know they are recognized by our society and they are very happy about this, so I think we have no occasion to bother them, why not let them live a peaceful life?”* (这些老兵已经很累了，我们是应该能帮就帮，但我觉得还是不要打扰他们的生活，他们已经知道社会认可他们了，并很高兴，我觉得没有必要再给他们平静的生活中添麻烦啦，让他们安安静静的度过以后的日子吧。)” Reading this, it is not surprising that MCMR fans created another forum named “Silent”, dedicated to discussing issues about helping veterans. To ensure that volunteers help veterans *“silently, respectfully, reliably and maturely”* (安静，尊严，稳妥，成熟), there is a strict application process to become a formal member of Silent. Silent members travel to Tengchong to help the veterans (Figure 5). From the 30 threads recorded in the Silent Forum a recurring theme emerged noting veterans’ unfair treatment for almost 60 years, and their reluctance and hesitation to accept visitors’ gifts due to a lack of trust. Silent Forum members want to keep their volunteering efforts “silent” and

continuous, avoiding public hype and media attention. One Silent member expressed his concern: “An old man of eighty years old was put on display by a reporter, and then he began to feel hopeful. But where is the reporter now? He was busy with other things soon after finishing his report. Did the old man need this kind of concern that forced him to recall the abandonment of others? (一位 80 岁的老人被记者拉出来展览，然后他感觉到有希望了。但是现在那个记者到哪里去了？他一报道完就去忙别的事儿了。老人却被迫唤起曾被别人抛弃的记忆，他需要这种关注吗？)”

Insert Figure 5 about here

2) Program of Youth of China

Among the 13 threads extracted from the MCMR forum, one very active thread with 1,710 postings was devoted to discussing the Youth of China Libraries. Youth of China is a dream of the character named Little Bookworm in MCMR and reflects one of the themes of MCMR. The idea of Youth of China originated from a paper entitled “Speech of Youth of China” (少年中国说) written by Qichao Liang (梁启超), a famous Chinese scholar, journalist, philosopher and reformist during the Qing Dynasty (1644–1911). Youth of China means China depends on its youth, especially their intelligence, richness, power, independence and freedom. First posted by the forum initiator “Writing for Fun (写着玩的)” in September of 2009, after discussing the idea in the QQ group with other MCMR fans, “Writing for Fun” indicated the goal of the Youth of China program would be to establish libraries for children living in the remote southwest mountain areas where the infrastructure is underdeveloped. It appears Youth of

China Libraries' long-term goals involve establishing a series of Youth of China agencies including free country clinics, children welfare associations, free senior housing and so on.

Interestingly, the first Youth of China Library is not located in Yunnan, the location where MCMR was shot, but in the Guizhou Province within the lesser-developed region of Southwest China. According to "Writing for Fun", the first library is located a four-hour drive from the capital city of Guizhou and is already built and open to the public. MCMR fans donated all the books and furniture such as bookshelves, tables and even the doorplate. Until now only the initiator has visited the library, but through their postings, a large number of fans have voiced their desire to travel and meet at the library in 2011. The photos included in Figure 6 were photographed and published online by "Writing for Fun" and the library manager.

Insert Figure 6 about here

In summary, while most fans donated money and materials online from the comfort of their homes, other fans have visited the donation locations to engage in further volunteer activities and/or to see with their own eyes the impact their activities on local residents. Also, while the specific volunteer activities differ between SS and MCMR fans, they largely overlap and are mostly focused on helping children in rural areas. Education is an important theme in both dramas, challenging the education system that is currently supported by the Chinese government. For MCMR, giving recognition to the forgotten veterans is also a central theme. Thus, the volunteer activities are not random acts of kindness but are directly related to themes emerging from the TV dramas. In addition, these activities can be seen as grassroots political activism that reflects bottom-up nationalism inspired by the TV drama. Overall, even though not

all fans have had the opportunity to travel, the volunteer work seems to spur a great desire to visit the actual locations to see the difference that fan contributions have made.

Remarkably, fans' postings also indicated some awareness of the potential negative impacts of their voluntourism, and their attempts to control them. For example, Silent Forum members developed rules each member must comply with in order to minimize disturbing the lives of the veterans they help, such as not speaking to traditional mass media about their volunteering activities, and not visiting veterans without first asking permission.

Motivations of Media-Induced Voluntourists

The fan postings were also analyzed with respect to indications as to why the TV fans engage in volunteering and, specifically, voluntourism.

SS Fan Motives

In the case of SS, fans said the specific values of SS -- “*Do something meaningful!* (*做有意义的事儿!*)” and “*Never abandon, never give up!* (*不抛弃不放弃!*)” drove them to engage in volunteering. Both lines are so popular among the Chinese that Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao cited the latter in the rescue campaign after the Wenchuan Earthquake in 2008. The notion of “*Never abandon, never give up!*” is so inspiring that one section of the drama’s script has been included in language textbooks of vocational high schools, and SS has become a topic in the College Entrance Examination in the Shandong Province. This is the type of spirit that motivates fans to engage in volunteering.

In terms of transitioning from SS fans to FSS members (volunteers), fans said they “*want to express their feelings for SS (想表达他们对《士兵突击》的情感)*” and an empathy-identification-altruism pattern appeared. At first, they feel moved by SS, “*feeling they could find themselves or others in their real life from the drama (感觉从剧中能够找到自己或生活中的其他人)*”. Next, they love the drama and identify “*with the emotional information and values delivered by the drama (这部作品里传达出的情感和精神内核)*”. Finally, they transfer this feeling into altruism; they want to “*Explain the power of good examples from SS by achieving excellence, such as working hard and living seriously, treasuring families and friends, and producing warmth to everyone around them (更加认真的生活努力的工作，珍惜亲人和朋友，给周围的人带去温暖，用最好的自己诠释榜样的力量)*”.

FSS members feel they can find friendship, trust and self-enhancement by volunteering. One FSS member described his relationship to FSS saying: “*To me, FSS is like my family. I have left FSS for a period due to personal reasons and I felt as empty as a drum at that time, similar to losing something. I recognized suddenly, FSS is so important for me, as it has integrated into my life and become an indispensable part of my life. (“幸福时光”对于我来说，更像另一个家，曾经因为我自己的原因离开了一段日子，那段时间心里空落落的，好像丢失什么一样。我突然明白了，对于我它是那么的重要，不知不觉，已经融入了我的生命，成为不能缺失的一部分。)*”

Reflecting on self-enhancement by volunteering, the originator of FSS, a village teacher, said: “*I now understand that we can live on a firm footing, life can show its glorious features without*

miracles, and we can nicely live and do things meaningful. (原来生活可以这样踏踏实实的过，原来生命可以这样沉淀出它的精彩，原来人生不需要轰轰烈烈也能展现它如花绽放的一面，原来人可以这样好好活、做有意义的事。)”。 Other benefits related to personal development are described in the words of one FSS member: “*Learn the power of commitment, learn the value of myself, learn the flexibility of work, and learn the power of gratitude and love. (懂得承诺的分量，懂得自己的价值，懂得做事的弹性，懂得感谢和相爱的力量)*”

MCMR Fan Motives

Similar to SS fans, many MCMR fans say they were greatly inspired by one of the values delivered by MCMR--“*To make things look like what they should be*”(*让事情是它本来的样子*) and the theme of “*finding back the lost spirit of Chinese people*” (*招回中国人丢失的魂*) . The empathy-identification-altruism pattern identified for SS fans also exists for MCMR fans. It is the strong sense of identification with the values delivered by the drama that drove fans to transform their intense empathy to altruistic actions.

In the case of helping veterans, MCMR fans’ intense empathy for the characters in MCMR evoked feelings of guilt for veterans forgotten and treated unfairly for almost 60 years due to political reasons. A MCMR fan stresses that “*it is a shame forgetting veterans and wanting to deny their existence (忘记老兵并试图否认他们的存在是羞耻的)*”. MCMR fans felt “*something meaningful should be done for veterans (应该为老兵们做些有意义的事)*”. So

they went to Tengchong or donated online to help veterans as well as published tons of documents related to the war. Indeed, MCMR fans have successfully evoked intense public debate about the issue.

Inspired by the charm of regimental chief Wenzhang Long in MCMR who kept finding the lost spirit of the Chinese people and is always able to find hope in depressing environments, fans said “*Youth of China is no longer just a yell in a paper of Qichao Liang or just a dream of Little Bookworm in MCMR. It is the common goal of us MCMR fans*” (“少年中国’不只是梁启超笔下的呐喊，也不只是小书虫心中的梦想，它，是我们共同的目标”). Similar to the volunteering work of FSS members, most MCMR fans feel “*it is meaningful to do things for the future of China* (应该为中国的未来做点事是有意义的)”. MCMR fans have a strong sense of responsibility to make a difference.

In summary, the fans of both TV dramas were strongly motivated to engage in volunteering and the voluntourism connected to it as a way to show their love for the dramas, express their identification with the values they portray, show their commitment as fans and achieve greater belonging to the community of dedicated fans. Their actions clearly help locals in Yunnan and other parts of China; however, the main motivating factor seems to be the ability to live the spirit of the dramas. Self-development, as the characters in the drama experience it also is a major driver according to the postings.

CONCLUSIONS

Based on a netnographic study of the two TV drama forums, this study found the TV dramas created strong motivations for their fans to volunteer in order to live the values promoted

by the shows. These volunteer activities, in turn, either require travel to the locations associated with the drama or evoke strong desires to see the effect of the volunteer work with their own eyes. The actual volunteer work conducted by fans takes on different forms, depending on the specific themes promoted in the dramas and encompass promoting education, helping veterans with gifts but also trying to give them recognition, and actual disaster relief work. Thus, the voluntourism undertaken by the fans involves work as well as inspection and spending time in local communities. As the dramas are highly political, these actions are as well and aim at realizing traditional Chinese cultural ideals as promoted in the storylines of the dramas. However, ultimately it is the desire to show commitment as a fan and also to experience the same personal transformations that the drama characters undergo that motivates the fans to engage in altruistic behaviors. Simply donating money is not enough for most fans, as they desire self-development that can only be achieved through actual travel to and work on location. While the voluntourists in Yunnan included in this study organized their trips around volunteering, they also engaged in general tourist activities. Traveling to bond with other fans in the real world was also a theme that emerged and supports the argument that cyberfandom is a main driver of the voluntourism examined in this paper.

Understanding voluntourism activities and their fandom-driven motives provides essential insights from theoretical and practical perspectives. The results of the study inform both the voluntourism as well as the media-induced tourism literature. The empathy-identification-altruism pattern contributes to understanding the process by which fans are becoming voluntourists. First, fans feel empathy for the characters in the drama; then they feel a strong sense of identification with the values of the drama at times changing their world view and lifestyle. Finally, fans choose to help others as a way of realizing the values embodied in the

dramas, participating in various onsite volunteering activities or simply traveling to the destinations to see the results of their or other fans' volunteer activities.

Further, the findings allow for an enhanced understanding of media-induced tourists and voluntourists, which is important for destination marketers looking to successfully connect to this very different group of travelers. The research results hinted at opportunities for destinations to encourage media-induced voluntourists to travel beyond their actual volunteer work assignment. They also illustrate the necessity to support these travelers in living the spirit of the drama through their trips. In addition, destinations could play an important role in fostering fan activities such as reenactments and helping fans connect with other fans while traveling. Furthermore, being aware of the power of TV dramas and the volunteer efforts they can spur in addition to travelling to a filming location, destination governments may consider establishing official policies to encourage filming activities, especially in poor areas in China.

The study has of course limitations. First, it is based on the researchers' interpretations of the fan postings. The great advantage of netnography is that texts used for analysis are unmediated. Yet, this is also a disadvantage as the texts only contain implied meanings and clarification questions cannot be asked. The authors suggest that future studies should involve in-depth interviews to ask fans directly about their motivations and also to uncover aspects of their trips that they might not include in public postings. Second, the ability to have coding reviewed by more than one Chinese-speaking researcher would also be beneficial. Third, this study focused on two popular TV dramas in China and the results are thus not only grounded in the culture of those specific dramas but also in Chinese culture and society. Studies of other TV dramas that have spurred volunteering and maybe even voluntourism are needed to test the empathy – identification – altruism pattern in other contexts.

Additionally, while the results of this study appear in general to lean more toward the positive, future studies may investigate the potential negative impacts of media-induced voluntourism, specifically, long-term impacts on communities after TV shows are cancelled or filming is moved to other locations. Conversely, voluntourism may be manageable for these small communities now, but should this media-induced voluntourism phenomenon continue to grow, a closer look at social and environmental issues is suggested.

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Figure 1. Example of Comment Posted on the Silent Forum

Figure 2. Left: Students are welcoming FSS members; Middle: A FSS member is helping a student to open the packaging of gifts; Right: Students show their new shoes donated by FSS members.

Figure 3. Left: Students are welcoming FSS members; Middle: The new building of SSHPS No.1;
Right: Students are performing a classic scene of the TV drama.

Figure 4. Left: Volunteers are distributing water buckets to teachers at SSHPS No. 1; Right: Volunteers are distributing water.

Figure 5. Left: Silent Forum members chatting with a veteran. Right: A veteran telling his experience of the war to Silent Forum members.

Figure 6. From left to right: Books donated by MCMR fans; The door of the library; Children are reading books in the library; The son of an MCMR fan is playing with a local child.

Table 1. Threads of FSS forum

Categories	Threads related to activities	Threads related to motives	Threads related to general information
Announcements	-	-	37
History	35	-	-
Promotion	-	40	-
Donation List	-	-	6
Recommended Articles	130	-	-
Essays	-	91	-
Data	-	33	-
Videos and Photos	20	-	-
Summary	185	164	43