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Governing contested community spaces under tourism commercialisation: Evidence from three Chinese settings

SICHENG LI

sichengli19@gmail.com

Okayama University

Jingqi Wang

Dongbei University of Finance and Economics

Cao-Nguyen Phan

Ho Chi Minh City University of Social Sciences and Humanities

Article

Keywords: Tourism commercialisation, Community governance, Everyday space, Social norms, Place attachment

Posted Date: November 12th, 2026

DOI: https://doi.org/10.21203/rs.3.rs-11386452/v1

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Additional Declarations: No competing interests reported.

Abstract

Tourism commercialisation creates competing claims to everyday community spaces. Drawing on 109 interviews and 24 field-observation records from Chengdu, Dalian and Dali, China, this study examines how formal rules, social norms and place-based meanings shape their negotiation. In Chengdu, administrative intervention coexists with disputes over residential quiet and night-time commerce. In Dalian, residents and officials report consultation, zoning and operational adjustments, alongside continuing concerns over noise and public-space use. In Dali, community environmental rules and cultural attachments coexist with the commercialisation of local identity. Across the cases, institutional boundaries differ from the practical arrangements through which they are interpreted and negotiated. Place-based attachments support claims over appropriate use without necessarily resolving questions of representation. The findings develop institutional-affective coupling as a relational perspective on boundary-setting, normative translation and contested place-based claims in community governance.

1. Introduction

Tourism commercialisation increasingly reorganises the everyday spaces, practices and meanings of host communities. Streets used for residential life become sites of visitor consumption, shared public spaces accommodate commercial activities, and locally significant cultural practices acquire market value. Such changes produce more than familiar debates about tourism's benefits and costs: they raise a governance question about who may use particular places, for what purposes, at which times and under whose rules. Residents may seek continuity in daily routines, businesses may prioritise commercial access, and visitors may seek experiences that depend on the very qualities commercialisation places under pressure. Tourism-related investment can transform residential areas into consumption-oriented spaces and intensify competition over their everyday use (Gotham, 2005). These competing claims make everyday space an object of negotiation rather than merely a setting in which tourism develops (Bianchi, 2018; Bramwell & Lane, 2011; Hall, 2019).

Tourism governance scholarship highlights institutional arrangements, community participation and trust (Bramwell & Lane, 2011; Hall, 2011; Nunkoo, 2017). Collaborative governance research further explains how interdependent actors coordinate decisions and negotiate shared goals (Emerson et al., 2012; Jamal & Getz, 1995). Yet the existence of formal rules does not establish how community members interpret those rules or whether they regard particular uses of space as acceptable. Administrative approval of a commercial activity, for example, may coexist with residents' objections to its effect on everyday life. Conversely, community consultation may produce practical adjustments without establishing lasting consensus.

Research on place attachment and emotional solidarity adds a further dimension. Place-based relationships influence residents' evaluations of tourism and their responses to local change (Ramkissoon et al., 2013; Stylidis, 2018; Woosnam et al., 2009). Studies of human-place relationships likewise illuminate residents' support for tourism (Song et al., 2024). Appeals to residential continuity, environmental quality and cultural identity can enter negotiations about commercial conduct and spatial access. Perceived threats to established place meanings may also motivate place-protective responses (Devine-Wright, 2009). They may

also conflict: different groups can attach different meanings to the same place, and informal ties can facilitate coordination while leaving questions about representation and accountability unresolved.

Formal institutional arrangements, everyday norms and attachments to place may reinforce one another or remain in tension. This study examines these relationships through specific governance practices and competing claims to community space.

This study asks: How do formal institutional arrangements, everyday social norms and affective place relations shape the negotiation of competing claims to community space under tourism commercialisation? The question is examined through a comparative qualitative study of three Chinese settings: an urban night-time tourism district in Chengdu, a coastal leisure community in Dalian and a heritage-oriented village community in Dali. The study draws on 109 interview records and 24 field observations across the three settings. The contrast among residential, public-space and cultural claims allows the analysis to distinguish documented links between rules, norms and place meanings from their mere coexistence.

The article makes two connected contributions to scholarship on community and spatial governance. First, it treats the ordinary timing, use and cultural meaning of community spaces as matters over which legitimate authority and acceptable conduct are negotiated. This extends discussion of tourism commercialisation beyond its impacts to the practical governance of competing place claims. Second, it uses institutional-affective coupling as a relational analytical perspective, distinguishing institutional boundary-setting, normative translation and affective recognition or contestation. The comparison shows variation in the extent to which rules are linked to negotiated conduct and demonstrates why place-based identification should not be equated with inclusive or transparent governance.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Tourism commercialisation as spatial and cultural change

Studies of host communities have examined residents' perceptions of tourism impacts, including livelihood opportunities, environmental pressures and distributive concerns (Andereck et al., 2005; Ap, 1992; Sharpley, 2014). Critical scholarship situates these impacts within wider processes of development and economic restructuring (Bianchi, 2018; Scheyvens & Biddulph, 2018). Yet commercialisation is not synonymous with visitor growth. It refers here to the increasing organisation, use and representation of places and cultural practices for tourism-related market exchange. Commercial activity can reorganise residential time, alter access to shared spaces or convert locally valued identities into marketable attributes. These changes invite questions about how permissible use is defined, whose expectations are recognised and how conflicting claims acquire practical legitimacy.

Commercialisation can reshape everyday life through decisions about opening hours, vending areas, noise, environmental maintenance and cultural representation. Analysing their governance therefore requires attention to everyday interactions as well as formal policy.

2.2 Institutional boundaries and the governance of everyday place

Studies of tourism governance emphasise institutional coordination, collaborative arrangements, public participation and trust (Ansell & Gash, 2008; Bramwell & Lane, 2011; Hall, 2011; Nunkoo, 2017). Network governance research also distinguishes the coordination structures through which collaborative arrangements are organised and managed (Provan & Kenis, 2008). Research has examined stakeholder collaboration in heritage management and community participation at heritage sites (Aas et al., 2005; Su & Wall, 2014). Other studies identify constraints on participation and the role of residents in tourism governance (Bichler, 2021; Tosun, 2000), as well as relationships among trust, participation and tourism support (Kim et al., 2025). Work on peripheral cultural tourism destinations highlights the gap that can separate formal governance structures from local policymaking capacity (Harfst et al., 2024). Tourism policy networks also shape whether relationships among local government, tourism businesses and the wider community enable or constrain coordination (Dredge, 2006). The remaining question is how formal requirements are interpreted and negotiated in community spaces shared by residents, businesses and visitors.

Institutional boundaries are not only administrative instruments. By defining permitted operating hours, spatial access and responsibilities, they also shape which uses of place receive formal recognition. Yet compliance, legitimacy and negotiated acceptance should not be conflated. Residents may regard authorised tourism activity as disruptive; businesses may seek clearer and more consistent restrictions; and officials may find implementation difficult despite clear procedures.

2.3 Affective place relations, cultural continuity and commodification

Research on place attachment, emotional solidarity and community identity explains important variation in residents' responses to tourism (Ramkissoon et al., 2013; Stylidis, 2018; Woosnam et al., 2009). Place-attachment theory further conceptualises these relationships through interactions among people, psychological processes and places, while emphasising the significance of place-based meanings (Lewicka, 2011; Scannell & Gifford, 2010). More recent work links human–place relationships and psychological empowerment with tourism support (Song et al., 2024), while destination and community identity have been associated with support for cultural heritage development (Cheng & Lai, 2026). An identity-based perspective similarly shows that residents' occupational and environmental identities are relevant to their attitudes towards tourism and support for its development (Nunkoo & Gursoy, 2012). Less attention has been paid to how place-based attachments enter decisions about the use of community space. A resident may invoke quietness, cultural continuity or a sense of belonging in questioning a commercial practice; a practitioner may invoke the same place qualities in defending tourism. Affective claims are consequently treated here as socially situated justifications and potential points of contestation, not as attitudes that automatically translate into collective action.

Social embeddedness and reciprocal obligations can facilitate coordination (Granovetter, 1985; Coleman, 1990; Collins, 2004). However, coordination through established personal relationships is analytically

different from transparent and accessible procedures for resolving competing claims. The former may coexist with, rather than remove, difficulties of representation.

Everyday norms and affective place relations must be distinguished. Norms concern socially recognised expectations about appropriate conduct, including reciprocity, reputation and informal sanctions. Affective relations concern the emotional, cultural and identity-related significance attributed to places and local practices. Attachment may provide a reason to defend a norm or challenge a decision, but it is not itself evidence that a particular norm is shared. The distinction matters when assessing whether governance practices reflect collective agreement, individual preference or contested understandings of place.

Affective commitments are neither inherently inclusive nor necessarily opposed to commercialisation. Tourism commodification can reshape how authenticity is negotiated without necessarily erasing cultural meaning (Cohen, 1988). Cultural identities and local aesthetics can be protected through community coordination while also being marketed as tourism experiences (Greenwood, 1989; MacCannell, 1973; Rickly, 2018). Reliance on interpersonal solutions may also leave uncertain how competing voices are represented.

3. Analytical framework: Institutions, social norms and place-based claims

3.1 Conceptualising institutional-affective coupling

Institutional-affective coupling is used here as a sensitising analytical framework for studying relationships among formal institutional arrangements, everyday social norms and affective place relations in community governance. Informed by institutional perspectives on rules and collective action (North, 1990; Ostrom, 2005), the framework examines how regulatory requirements are encountered in places that carry social and emotional significance.

Three dimensions guide the analysis. Formal institutional arrangements consist of codified requirements, administrative procedures and recognised structures of decision-making. Everyday social norms refer to collectively recognised expectations about conduct, including reciprocity, tacit rules and informal obligations. Affective place relations refer to belonging, attachment, identification and the significance attributed to particular places and practices (Ramkissoon et al., 2013). The dimensions are connected in lived experience but analytically distinct: rules identify authorised practices, norms indicate socially expected conduct, and affective relations help explain why particular uses or changes matter to actors.

Coupling refers to empirically identifiable relationships among formal institutional arrangements, everyday expectations and place-based claims. Disconnection occurs when these dimensions remain separate or generate competing interpretations of legitimate spatial use.

3.2 Three interrelated governance processes

Institutional boundary-setting refers to the establishment, interpretation and enforcement of requirements governing commercial access, operating hours, environmental responsibilities, spatial use and decision-

making procedures. Such boundaries regulate activities and allocate formal recognition to particular claims on community space.

Normative translation refers to occasions when formal requirements are discussed, adjusted or incorporated into locally understood expectations. Evidence may include consultation followed by changes to operating hours, voluntary behavioural adjustment or repeated negotiation over acceptable use.

Affective recognition and contestation refers to the invocation of residential continuity, environmental qualities, belonging and cultural identity in arguments over tourism-related change. Such claims may support coordination or challenge a proposed arrangement.

The three processes are potentially interrelated rather than sequential or mutually exclusive. Institutional boundaries can open or restrict opportunities for negotiation, local expectations may modify the enactment of rules, and claims about place may influence which activities are defended or contested.

3.3 Empirical application to comparative case analysis

The framework is applied to identifiable governance episodes and reported practices rather than by assigning fixed types to entire communities. Institutional boundary-setting is indicated by accounts or documents concerning permits, inspections, operating restrictions, village rules or complaint procedures. Normative translation requires evidence of negotiation, interpretation or behavioural adjustment in relation to a shared expectation. Affective recognition or contestation requires an explicit place-based claim connected to an issue of use, regulation or representation. Each form of evidence is assessed in relation to its source, distinguishing a participant's report from an independently corroborated institutional outcome.

Evidence of coupling is strongest when accounts connect a governance concern, an institutional response and a subsequent change within the same episode. Separate references to formal rules and local place values are treated as evidence of coexistence rather than a demonstrated connection. Three analytical questions organise the comparison: How are institutional boundaries established and experienced? When are these boundaries negotiated or disconnected from everyday expectations? How do place-based meanings enter claims over commercialisation, and what remains uncertain about their influence on governance decisions?

4. Methodology

4.1 Case selection

The study compares three Chinese tourism communities in order to examine how commercialisation generates competing claims on residential space, shared public space and culturally meaningful environments. Chengdu A is an urban night-time tourism district, Dalian B a coastal leisure community and Dali C a village setting in which ethnic heritage, environmental management and tourism-related livelihoods intersect. The settings differ in the forms of commerce, spatial use and public or community-level rules discussed by participants. These differences permit comparison of how rules, local expectations and place-based meanings are experienced in distinct circumstances.

The three cases were selected to contrast disputes over residential time, shared coastal space and heritage-related cultural representation. Each setting combined tourism-related commerce with places used in everyday community life and included identifiable governance practices addressing related tensions. Their differences allow attention to temporal conflict in a residential district, negotiation over coastal public space and the governance of culturally meaningful village environments. Table 1 records the grounds for comparison.

Table 1
Comparative characteristics of the three cases

Case	Place context	Spatial form of commercialisation	Main spatial-cultural tension	Basis for comparative selection
Chengdu A	Urban night-time tourism district	Night economy, entertainment consumption, restaurants and visitor flows	Residential rhythms and quietness vs night-time consumption	Urban residential–commercial temporal overlap
Dalian B	Coastal leisure community	Seasonal leisure consumption, vendors, cafés and public-space use	Everyday public-space use vs commercial leisure and visitor mobility	Competing uses of coastal public space
Dali C	Ethnic heritage village	Heritage consumption, homestays, cultural display and livelihood restructuring	Everyday ethnic life and cultural continuity vs commodified cultural landscape	Heritage-based tourism and the commercial representation of community culture

Note. *Cases are anonymised at the participant level. The comparative categories were interpreted from recorded interviews and field observations. They are not statistically representative of the three cities.*

The unit of comparison is the negotiation of tourism-related claims to everyday community space across three contrasting settings.

4.2 Data sources

The supplied source archive contains 109 individual interview records: 39 from Chengdu A, 37 from Dalian B and 33 from Dali C. These contain 481 recorded question-and-answer pairs. It also contains 24 field-observation entries, eight per case. Participants were grouped by the source-file sections as residents (36), tourism practitioners and operators (37), tourists (30), and local officials or key informants (6); several residents also described business activities. The records vary in the number of questions and length of responses. The anonymised review records do not consistently preserve interview dates, durations or interview modes. Table 2 gives the source-supported sample composition, and Supplementary Information, Appendix A, records the case and actor-group distribution.

Table 2
Composition of Interview Samples Across Three Field Sites (N = 109)

Participant group	No.	Gender M/F	Age range 20–35 / 36–55 / 56+	Primary roles	Field contexts
Residents	36	17 / 19	8 / 15 / 13	Local villagers, urban residents, ethnic minority members	Reflecting community adaptation to tourism development across rural, coastal and urban sites
Practitioners	37	20 / 17	14 / 21 / 2	Homestay owners, café and restaurant operators, small vendors, cultural entrepreneurs	Representing both local and in-migrant entrepreneurs involved in the tourism economy
Tourists	30	15 / 15	23 / 7 / 0	Domestic and short-term visitors	Mostly middle-class travellers seeking cultural, aesthetic or restorative experiences
Local officials/key informants	6	3 / 3	0 / 6 / 0	Village cadres, tourism administrators, community organizers	Providing institutional and governance perspectives on tourism management
Total	109	55 / 54	45 / 49 / 15	-	-

Note. *M/F = male/female. Age bands are 20–35, 36–55 and 56 + years. Gender and age summaries were checked against the original source headers, while personal descriptors were suppressed from the pseudonymised review files. Actor groups follow the interview source sections and should not be interpreted as mutually exclusive livelihood identities. Case-by-case counts are given in Appendix A.*

Six interviewees were local officials or key informants. Accounts of institutional arrangements were therefore interpreted alongside resident, practitioner and tourist perspectives.

The 24 field-observation entries concern street use, crowding, night markets, tourist behaviour, sanitation and environmental routines in the three study settings. The observational record includes researcher reflections as well as descriptions of events; these are not treated as independent confirmation of reported governance outcomes. Interview and observation files were compared to distinguish respondents' descriptions of management arrangements from directly observed practices. Interview extracts quoted in English are translations or close renditions of the recorded Chinese responses, which provide the source text for verification. The source files contain participant pseudonyms; identifying and contextual descriptors were withheld from the confidential review version. Participants gave verbal informed consent, as described in the ethics declaration.

4.3 Coding records and analytical transparency

The available analytic archive contains three case-specific exports of open coding, axial coding and selective coding. These stages were used to organise interview and field-observation accounts and to compare how respondents described tourism-related conflict, institutional practices, expectations about acceptable conduct and attachments to place. The comparison was informed by qualitative thematic approaches (Braun and Clarke, 2006; Kuckartz, 2014). The supplied exports preserve original Chinese code labels, illustrative source excerpts, category definitions and selective-category relationships.

The Chengdu coding export groups issues such as sensory disturbance, pressures on everyday routines, stakeholder disagreements and difficulties of enforcement. The Dalian export groups economic change, conditions in shared coastal space, community relations, place identity and management responses. The Dali export groups ecological stewardship, moderated commercialisation, locally embedded identity, livelihood adaptation and village coordination. These are case-specific axial categories, rather than one common set of codes applied identically across the three settings. Comparisons were therefore made by checking source passages and actor positions before drawing broader interpretations about institutional boundaries, social norms and place-based claims.

The fixed coding package contains 971 open-code records, comprising 367 from Chengdu, 348 from Dalian and 256 from Dali. These are coded entries, not 971 different concepts or participants. The export also contains 24 case-specific axial categories (11, 6 and 7 respectively) and three selective core categories, one per case. During preparation of the review materials, 589 exact-text links were established between open-code entries and the available interview or observation records. These links provide an additional means of source verification and are distinct from the original coding stages. The case-specific categories informed the comparative interpretation of governance processes across the three settings. Supplementary Information, Appendices B-D, presents the documented stages and selected source-to-interpretation examples.

Because the available records do not include a recoding matrix or sequential category-accumulation log, no numerical coding-reliability coefficient or saturation threshold is reported. Instead, the evidential basis of interpretation is made inspectable through the interview index, original-language question-and-answer material, field observations, code labels, axial-category membership lists and explicitly traceable excerpts. Reports of policy implementation and effects are treated as participants' accounts unless separately supported by an observation in the deposited record.

5. Findings: Negotiating contested community spaces

5.1 Chengdu A: Institutional boundary-making between residential and commercial temporalities

Chengdu A illustrates contested boundaries between night-time commerce and residential life. Residents described noise, light, congestion and disruptions to household routines. One resident explained that people were still singing outside at eleven or midnight and that light entered the home as if it were daytime (Chengdu, resident, CD-R01). Another said, *"I can watch the bustle from the balcony, but when the music starts*

I close the window" (Chengdu, resident, CD-R11). A local management respondent described the principal complaints as *"noise and rubbish"*, with complaints about daytime noise and night-time fights (Chengdu, local official, CD-O01). One tourist reported that friends had to shout to converse because of the noise and expressed sympathy for affected residents (Chengdu, tourist, CD-T05). Another proposed having separate *"quiet streets"* and *"active streets"* to allow visitors to choose between different night-time experiences (Chengdu, tourist, CD-T01).

The source accounts document administrative intervention, but not a uniformly accepted regulatory settlement. A local official reported joint patrols and attempts to introduce noise limits by zone (Chengdu, local official, CD-O01). The same respondent acknowledged that standards were difficult to implement because shops and business types varied widely, with persuasion more common than penalties (CD-O01). Residents and operators raised different practical concerns. A parent described using earplugs and white noise to protect a child's sleep and remarked that *"the costs fall entirely on our household"* (Chengdu, resident, CD-R05). A resident employed as a night-shift driver proposed dedicated stopping areas and coordination across transport authorities because traffic and deliveries disturbed daily life (Chengdu, resident, CD-R08). These accounts illustrate how tourism-related commercial activity places pressure on residential routines and local mobility.

The commercial perspective was similarly ambivalent. A night-food vendor recognised problems of *"cooking fumes, noise and occupying the road"* and said that businesses could comply when rules were clear, adding that he would register for a designated night-food zone (Chengdu, practitioner, CD-P05). CD-R05 requested a clear response to complaints rather than assuming residents would absorb the costs of commercial activity. The case reveals tensions between administrative intervention, unequal residential burdens and demands for predictable operating rules.

The source record also describes a specific attempt at negotiated adjustment. A community official stated that resident-business meetings had been organised and that several shops voluntarily reduced their noise afterwards (Chengdu, local official/key informant, CD-O02). This reported consultation illustrates a limited form of normative adjustment at the business level. The Chengdu case thus foregrounds the contested practical legitimacy of night-time boundaries: the same space is promoted for consumption while remaining part of residents' ordinary lives.

5.2 Dalian B: Negotiating the commercial transformation of coastal public space

Dalian B presents a coastal public-space setting in which seasonal tourism, vending and leisure activity generated both economic opportunities and problems of noise, congestion and sanitation. One long-term resident recalled a subdistrict meeting at which residents suggested changes to operating hours and additional public toilets, and said that conditions subsequently improved (Dalian, resident, DL-R03). Another reported that a complaint made through a community messaging group was followed by an official noise measurement and a modest reduction in evening noise (Dalian, resident, DL-R12). These accounts describe practical responses to residents' concerns about noise and operating hours. A local official also reported

holding several resident discussion meetings about matters including quiet hours (Dalian, local official, DL-O01).

Two governance informants described different components of local management. One reported that a unified vendor-permit system had been introduced in 2023, with training and signed operating commitments (Dalian, local official, DL-O01). The other identified the central problem as balancing residents' need for quiet, vendors' need for income and tourists' desire for experience, summarising the tension as managing *"the environment by day and people's feelings at night"* (Dalian, local official, DL-O02).

The second official further reported dividing the pedestrian street into entertainment, catering and leisure zones and using volunteer patrols to help manage tensions (DL-O02). That respondent also stated that trading hours had been changed after noise complaints. Visitor perspectives remained mixed: one tourist described the stalls as orderly and the market as well managed (Dalian, tourist, DL-T08), while another regarded the waterfront as comparatively clean (Dalian, tourist, DL-T03). A third complained about vendors shouting and excessive loudspeaker volume (Dalian, tourist, DL-T07). Visitor dissatisfaction persisted alongside zoning, consultation and operational adjustment.

A local official reported a reduction in complaints following management changes and described the goal of allowing commercial activity and everyday life to coexist (Dalian, local official, DL-O01). Together, the interviews and observations depict ongoing spatial adjustment through consultation, rule-setting and operational changes amid continuing disagreements.

5.3 Dali C: Affective place governance and cultural commodification in an ethnic heritage village

Dali C illustrates the prominence of place-based meanings within accounts of tourism development and village governance. Interviewees emphasised quietness, small-scale commerce, environmental care and cultural continuity. A tourist contrasted Dali with Lijiang, observing that Dali still *"retains the texture of everyday life"* (Dali, tourist, DA-T01). The same respondent associated the visit with soft light and time appearing to slow down. A resident argued that Dali should not follow an urban model of development but should *"preserve the quietness of the lake"* (Dali, resident, DA-R10). Another resident valued what she called *"quiet liveliness"*, accepting visitor activity while resisting excessive commercialisation (Dali, resident, DA-R01). These accounts locate place-based meanings in everyday rhythms, environmental values and local identity. Heritage-based livelihoods also made aspects of local identity marketable. A local craft practitioner described tie-dye and embroidery as forms of cultural revitalisation, emphasising handmade production rather than mass manufacturing (Dali, practitioner, DA-P04). This illustrates a tension between commercial opportunity and the everyday meanings through which local products acquire value (MacCannell, 1973; Greenwood, 1989; Rickly, 2018).

Reported local rules and coordination arrangements provide a more concrete basis for examining governance. A tourism-management official described an *"ecological council"* involving villagers, homestay owners and government representatives, with discussion of matters such as waste collection (Dali, local official, DA-O02). The same official reported a three-homestay limit per investor within the village, intended to prevent excessive concentration of ownership (DA-O02). A community council representative described an

environmental-points scheme in which households with good sanitation could obtain credits and said that the rule had been devised by villagers (Dali, key informant, DA-O01). A local homestay operator separately reported village restrictions on late-night music (Dali, practitioner, DA-P05). Together, these accounts describe community-level coordination over environmental protection and commercial conduct.

The relationship between place-based commitments and commercial restraint was not automatic. One homestay operator reported deliberately leaving one or two days unbooked during the busy season because full occupancy made work and guest management more difficult (Dali, practitioner, DA-P13). Another practitioner described a village self-management group that expected incoming businesses to accept an environmental agreement (Dali, practitioner, DA-P09). These actions are compatible with an emphasis on local quality of life, but the source record does not establish that affective attachment rather than business or environmental concerns was the primary cause.

Dali C thus illustrates how place-based meanings can be invoked alongside rules on the scale and conduct of tourism businesses. Cultural and environmental commitments were prominent in interviews, and respondents reported collective arrangements for sanitation and commercial activity. These arrangements highlight the intersection of place-based commitments and community governance while raising questions about how collective decisions are documented and whose interests are represented.

5.4 Cross-case comparison: Configurations of institutional-affective coupling

Across the cases, tourism commercialisation produced disputes over different aspects of everyday place: residential time, access to public space and the cultural representation of local life. The comparison examines whether boundaries established through formal regulation were connected with negotiated everyday expectations and whether place-based claims could be traced into identifiable governance practices.

In Chengdu A, the record links resident accounts of night-time disturbance with an official account of patrols and difficulties enforcing noise-related restrictions. A separate community official described meetings followed by voluntary noise reduction at a few shops. Residents requested greater protection of everyday routines, while operators requested stable rules. Taken together, the accounts show administrative boundary-setting and some reported local adjustment, but not shared acceptance across the district.

In Dalian B, residents and officials supplied more explicit accounts of meetings, complaints and operational responses. Respondents described consultation about trading hours, noise measurement, permit requirements, zoning and volunteer patrols. Some visitors experienced order and cleanliness while others reported continuing noise. This combination indicates practical negotiation and contested public-space use rather than either a settled consensus or the absence of regulation.

In Dali C, participants valued the lake environment, local craft practices and a slower pace of everyday life. Officials and practitioners reported environmental agreements, an ecological council, restrictions on homestay concentration and moderate-scale business choices. These accounts suggest connections between locally valued qualities and collective arrangements while leaving questions of participation and

representation unresolved. The commercial value attributed to local identity also complicates a simple distinction between cultural protection and commodification.

The comparison yields two analytical insights. First, an institutional boundary and a locally recognised practical arrangement are not equivalent: Chengdu illustrates the tension between enforcement and everyday expectations, whereas Dalian offers reports that connect consultation with specific operational responses. Second, Dali shows that local attachments can coexist with community-level rules and marketable cultural identities without proving that attachment itself determines governance outcomes. Table 3 summarises the evidence for connections and gaps across the three cases.

Table 3
Cross-case comparison of institutional-affective coupling in tourism governance

Analytical dimension	Chengdu A	Dalian B	Dali C
Tourism commercialisation and spatial-cultural tensions	Night-time visitor activity overlaps with homes, generating resident reports of noise, light and mobility disturbance.	Coastal leisure activities intensify competition over shared public space, operating hours, sanitation and visitor movement.	Heritage tourism commercialises cultural identity, environmental qualities and everyday village life, creating tensions between cultural continuity and market-oriented representation.
Institutional boundary-setting	Joint patrols and attempted noise zoning are described by a local official, alongside enforcement difficulty.	One informant describes unified permits and vendor training; another reports spatial zoning and operating-hour changes.	Officials and residents report council meetings, environmental agreements, late-night restrictions and limits on homestay concentration.
Normative translation	A community informant reports resident-business meetings followed by voluntary noise reduction at several shops; wider agreement is unverified.	Residents and officials report discussion meetings, noise monitoring and responses to operational concerns.	Village and business informants report collective environmental rules and consultation; their coverage is not independently verified.
Affective recognition and contestation	Residents ask for quiet time and complaint follow-up; tourists also describe noise-related dissatisfaction.	Residents seek accessible coastal spaces while visitors offer both positive and negative appraisals of market management.	Residents, tourists and practitioners value everyday rhythms, lake quality and craft traditions, which also feature in commercial offerings.
Institutional-affective relationship	Formal intervention and individual voluntary responses coexist with contested expectations and enforcement difficulties.	Specific reported links connect resident concerns, meetings, noise monitoring and operational adjustments.	Valued place qualities coexist with reported governance mechanisms; no causal role of attachment is demonstrated.

Note. *The table synthesises evidence from interviews, field observations and coding records. Participant identifiers correspond to the deposited source files. Institutional practices are identified as reported where independent documentary verification was unavailable.*

Analytical dimension	Chengdu A	Dalian B	Dali C
Illustrative empirical evidence	CD-R05: household disturbance and cost; CD-P05: preference for clear rules; CD-O01: patrols and enforcement limits; CD-O02: reported consultations.	DL-R03: reported resident forum; DL-R12: monitoring and reduced noise; DL-O01: licensing and meetings; DL-O02: zoning and operating hours; DL-T07: noise concerns.	DA-R10: preserving lakeside quiet; DA-P04: craft and cultural commercialisation; DA-O01: village environmental points; DA-O02: council and reported homestay restriction; DA-P13: booking restraint.
Remaining tensions and limitations	Residential and commercial expectations remain contested despite regulatory intervention.	Operational adjustments coexist with continuing complaints.	Participation in collective decisions and the formal status of reported rules remain unclear.
Comparative governance configuration	Administrative boundary-setting amid contested everyday expectations	Reported consultation and operational adjustment, with residual tensions	Reported collective environmental governance alongside heritage commodification

Note. *The table synthesises evidence from interviews, field observations and coding records. Participant identifiers correspond to the deposited source files. Institutional practices are identified as reported where independent documentary verification was unavailable.*

6. Discussion

6.1 Commercialisation and the governance of everyday place

The findings reposition tourism commercialisation as a problem of governing competing claims to ordinary places. Previous research has addressed its economic restructuring, cultural representation and transformation of tourist spaces (Bianchi, 2018; MacCannell, 1973; Edensor, 2001). This study specifies how tourism-related commercial activity raises questions of legitimate timing, access and representation in spaces that retain everyday community meanings. Everyday spatial practices thus become objects of governance rather than mere outcomes of tourism development.

The three settings reveal distinct forms of this problem. In Chengdu, residential and commercial uses competed over night-time rhythms. In Dalian, the location and operation of commercial activities were discussed in relation to shared coastal space. In Dali, identities and everyday village qualities mattered to both residents and the tourism economy. Formal permission to use a place does not settle questions about its meaning and legitimacy for affected community actors.

6.2 Rules, norms and the limits of institutional-affective coupling

The principal analytical contribution is a relational distinction between the presence of governance institutions and their enactment in locally meaningful places. Governance research has already

demonstrated the importance of formal institutions, participation and trust (Bramwell & Lane, 2011; Hall, 2011; Nunkoo, 2017), including mismatches between formal structures and local policymaking capacity (Harfst et al., 2024). The present comparison adds attention to the observable points at which formal boundaries are interpreted through community expectations. Institutional-affective coupling identifies how institutional boundary-setting, normative translation and affective recognition or contestation intersect in everyday community governance.

The relationship between institutional rules and everyday expectations becomes clearer when participants describe consultation followed by specific operational adjustments. Affective recognition likewise requires more than the expression of pride or attachment: its governance significance depends on whether a place-based claim enters discussion, justification or contestation of a concrete arrangement. The reported links between consultation and operational adjustment are clearer in this record than any causal links between attachment and formal rule-making.

Chengdu and Dalian provide a useful contrast. In Chengdu, an official described patrols and enforcement difficulty, a community official reported consultation followed by voluntary adjustments, and residents and vendors described costs or uncertainty about acceptable commercial activity. In Dalian, interviews refer to resident meetings, noise monitoring, zoning and subsequent changes in operational practice. Continuing visitor complaints reveal the limits of these operational adjustments.

Dali complicates a simple alignment argument. References to environmental quietness and cultural continuity coexist with reported village-level rules, ecological consultation and small-business self-restraint, yet their temporal or causal relationship is not established. Residents' place-based commitments may furnish justifications for coordination, but these qualities can also become marketable representations of local experience. These accounts highlight the distinction between place-based coordination and transparent community representation.

6.3 Place-based claims, representation and procedural accountability

Research on place attachment, emotional solidarity and community identity has primarily examined residents' attitudes towards tourism and support for development (Ramkissoon et al., 2013; Stylidis, 2018; Woosnam et al., 2009; Song et al., 2024; Cheng & Lai, 2026). This study extends that scholarship by examining how residential continuity, public accessibility, environmental quality and cultural identity become competing claims over spatial use. Different actors may attach different meanings to the same place, creating tensions over whose expectations receive recognition in community governance.

Governance consequently involves both the regulation of spatial conduct and the recognition of competing claims to place. Formal rules determine permissible activities, while negotiation reveals whose expectations are represented in their implementation. Dali particularly illustrates why locally embedded coordination and procedural accountability should be considered separately. Research on justice in tourism governance highlights the importance of participation, recognition and fairness in decisions affecting host communities (Jamal & Camargo, 2014). Participants described a council, self-management agreements, environmental incentives and restrictions on business scale, but the supplied records do not establish who participated in

every decision or whether outsiders had comparable access to negotiation. At the same time, local craft practices, tranquillity and village aesthetics appeared in accounts of the destination's market appeal. Assessing representation and policy influence requires closer examination of local decision-making records and participants' involvement.

6.4 Implications for community governance and future research

The findings suggest several context-sensitive implications for community governance. In places where commercial uses overlap with residential life, formal restrictions should be accompanied by accessible ways for affected actors to explain how rules operate in practice. Consultation has greater analytical and practical significance when concerns can be traced into observable changes, such as revised operating hours, noise arrangements or public-space management. The Dalian evidence illustrates this possibility, while persisting complaints caution against equating consultation with a durable settlement.

In heritage-oriented communities, the cultural and environmental meanings of places warrant recognition without assuming that reported councils and local agreements represent every interest. Documenting how business rules are developed, communicated and enforced could clarify the accountability of such arrangements.

Future studies could examine the same governance episodes longitudinally, documenting when a place-based claim enters an institutional decision and whether an adjustment becomes an enduring everyday norm. More systematic access to meeting records and implementation data could test rival explanations for reported change. Comparisons across differently situated communities could also clarify the extent to which the present observations reflect broader patterns rather than particular institutional histories.

7. Conclusion

This study examined how formal rules, everyday norms and place-based meanings shape the governance of contested community spaces in Chengdu, Dalian and Dali. The comparison identifies distinct relationships among administrative intervention, local negotiation and cultural or environmental commitments. In Chengdu, an official's description of enforcement difficulties coexisted with residents' requests for residential protection and a separate community account of limited voluntary adjustments. In Dalian, participants reported meetings, noise monitoring, zoning and changes to commercial operations, although complaints persisted. In Dali, accounts of cultural and environmental values accompanied village rules and business self-restraint, without demonstrating that attachment caused those rules.

The study contributes a relational perspective on contested community spaces by distinguishing the existence of regulation from the negotiation of its practical legitimacy and by treating attachment to place as a potential claim rather than automatic evidence of collective agreement. This approach also informs research on spatial legitimacy and community representation beyond tourism destinations. The study draws on 109 interviews and 24 field observations, including accounts from six local officials or key informants. The available materials do not permit systematic verification of administrative decisions or the long-term

outcomes of governance arrangements. Future research combining interviews, decision records and repeated observations could examine the durability of negotiated practices and the representation of different community groups.

Declarations

Funding

This research received no specific funding from any funding agency in the public, commercial, or not-for-profit sectors.

Competing interests

The authors declare that they have no competing interests.

Declaration of generative AI use

ChatGPT (OpenAI) was used to assist with grammar checking. The authors retain responsibility for verifying all research claims, quotations, interpretations and the final manuscript.

Ethical approval

This study involved a non-interventional online questionnaire administered to 600 adult leisure travellers in China. The research examined tourism-related motivations, satisfaction, perceived value, personality characteristics and behavioural intentions. It did not involve clinical procedures, biological samples, health-related interventions or the collection of directly identifying information in the analytical dataset.

Formal institutional ethics approval was not obtained before data collection, and no institutional ethics committee granted an exemption or waiver. The study was conducted with attention to voluntary participation, informed consent, anonymity and participant confidentiality.

The relevant Chinese regulatory context includes the Measures for Ethical Review of Scientific and Technological Activities (Trial) (Guo Ke Fa Jian [2023] No. 167). Article 2 includes research involving human participants, including surveys, within the scope of ethical review. Article 22 provides for simplified review procedures for certain minimal-risk activities but does not establish an automatic exemption. No formal review determination was obtained for the present study. Official regulation: https://www.most.gov.cn/xxgk/xinxifenlei/fdzdgknr/fgzc/gfxwj/gfxwj2023/202310/t20231008_188309.html

Informed consent

Before accessing the questionnaire, participants were informed of the research purpose, the voluntary nature of participation and the anonymous treatment of their responses. Participation was voluntary, and respondents indicated their informed consent by proceeding with and submitting the online questionnaire. No written signatures were collected because consent was obtained electronically through the questionnaire procedure.

Data availability

The de-identified analytical dataset, survey questionnaire and supporting documentation are available from the corresponding author upon reasonable request, subject to applicable confidentiality and data-protection requirements.

Author contributions

Author contribution details have been redacted for double-anonymised peer review. The full statement is provided in the submission system.

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