

On the Sustainable Development of Cultural Tourism of Chinese Ethnic Minorities at the Age of Tourism

ZHANG Baiping^{[a],[b],*}

^[a] School of Economics, Central University of Finance and Economics, Beijing, China;

^[b] Anshun University, Anshun City, Guizhou Province, China
*Corresponding author.

Received 3 September 2021; accepted 15 October 2021
Published online 26 December 2021

Abstract

Many ethnic minority groups still reserve their own original cultures at their towns and villages in west China. In the age of tourism, these original cultures become great tourist attractions, and ethnic minority villages and towns become tourist destinations. The adaptive exploitation of ethnic minority cultures means commoditizing these original cultures for tourists' consumption on the condition of protection. Discovering and arranging ethnic minority cultures is the base of protection and exploitation. The main types of the adaptive exploitation of ethnic minority cultures are as follows: displaying on stages, exhibiting in the museums, and designing cultural activities for tourists' experiences, and, producing souvenirs with ethnic minority cultural characteristics for tourism consumers.

Key words: The culture of Chinese ethnic minorities; The adaptive exploitation; The age of tourism; West China

Zhang, B. P. (2021). On the Sustainable Development of Cultural Tourism of Chinese Ethnic Minorities at the Age of Tourism. *Canadian Social Science*, 17(6), 68-71. Available from: <http://www.cscanada.net/index.php/css/article/view/12389> DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.3968/12389>

INTRODUCTION

According to the UNWTO General Assembly, at its 22nd session (2017), Cultural Tourism implies "A type of tourism activity in which the visitor's essential motivation is to learn, discover, experience and consume the tangible and intangible cultural attractions/products in a tourism destination. These attractions/products relate to a set of

distinctive material, intellectual, spiritual and emotional features of a society that encompasses arts and architecture, historical and cultural heritage, culinary heritage, literature, music, creative industries and the living cultures with their lifestyles, value systems, beliefs and traditions¹". The culture is the core and base in cultural tourism.

The People's Republic of China is a country with 56 ethnic groups. Every ethnic group, solely or cooperatively, created their own tangible and intangible cultures as well as their living environments in history. The culture of Chinese ethnic minorities refers to a set of daily life and production styles, ethnic group's conventions and crafts, and their living environments. The Chinese ethnic groups almost live in the west China, mainly including Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region, Ningxia Hui Autonomous Region, Xinjiang Autonomous Region, Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region, Xizang Autonomous Region, Sichuan Province, Qinghai Province, Gansu Province, Guizhou Province, and Yunnan Province, and, many ethnic minority groups still reserve their own original cultures at towns and villages. Ethnic cultural tourism, which stresses the great ethnic tradition (Graburn, 2009), and bases tourism activity on the ethnic culture, has become a very important tourism sector from 2015 in China's ethnic regions. By 2020, there are 1190 villages awarded title "Village with Chinese Ethnic Minority Characteristics" in these ten provincial and autonomous regions, accounting for 72% of the total. Meanwhile, in Guizhou and Yunnan provinces, the ratio of tourism receipts to their provincial GDP exceeded 50%, and in other western regions, except Qinghai and Ningxia regions, the ratio exceeded 20%, in 2018, that meant, in west China, the tourism industry induced by the tourist attraction of original ethnic minority culture makes a very positive contribution to local development and the renaissance of the fading ethnic arts. Obviously, for west

¹ <https://www.unwto.org/tourism-and-culture>

China, exploiting the original ethnic minority culture to forge ahead with the tourism industry is a great chance to promote local economy at the age of tourism.

Convention for the Protection of the Architectural Heritage of Europe (Granada, 1985) proposed fostering “the use of protected properties in the light of the needs of contemporary life and the adaptation when appropriate of old buildings for new uses”, namely, the adaptive reuse of architectural heritage, “recognizing the value of permitting public access to protected properties”. People could have access to the ethnic architectural heritage to visit, or even to lodge. The ethnic intangible culture could not leave its environment, both of which are an entity, while the tourist generating regions are separate from ethnic cultural tourism destinations. At the age of tourism, the exploitation of ethnic culture for tourist consumption should target the needs of contemporary life as well, which is entitled the adaptive exploitation. The adaptive exploitation of ethnic minority culture put stress on both showing the authenticity of the culture and the needs of contemporary life. As a response to this, the designer of cultural products should understand the ethnic minority culture and the potential tourist.

The exploitation of the original ethnic minority culture must follow two great principles: protection and market law. Protecting the local ethnic minority culture is the premise for local sustainable development, while market law means economic profit for economic activities. The adaptive exploitation of ethnic minority culture implies protective exploitation to local culture and tourist’s satisfaction to cultural tourism product. The adaptive exploitation of ethnic minority culture involves its own logical path, which is from discovery and arrangement to tourism product, then to tourist consumption.

1. DISCOVERY AND ARRANGEMENT

The ethnic culture is the peculiar cultural tourism resource in the ethnic areas, namely, it is different from the tourist’s culture. Difference generates attraction. The important fact is that, in west China, there exists difference between ethnic minority villages within a same ethnic group. Discovering and arranging the local ethnic minority culture is the logical starting point to protect and exploit ethnic minority culture. This work, namely culture census, could investigate the current situation of local ethnic minority culture, discover its core value, that helps find how to protect and exploit it. Increasing tourism demand facilitates governments’ zeal to exploit ethnic minority culture; worry about overexploiting and misusing cultural resource provokes scholars to undertake cultural census.

In China, the first intangible cultural census at national level began in June, 2005², and simultaneously,

² Ministry of Culture and Tourism of the People’s Republic of China. https://www.mct.gov.cn/whzx/bnsj/fwzwhyys/201111/20111128_765121.htm

released the suggestion on protection of the intangible cultural heritage and carried out protective work such as supporting the intangible cultural inheritors and listing the intangible cultural representative works. In 2019, the Ministry of Culture and Tourism of the People’s Republic of China approved Hainan Province, Guizhou Province, Sichuan Province, Qinghai Province, Zhejiang Province, Inner Mongolia Autonomous Region and Chongqing Municipality as the first experimental area for census of culture and tourism resources. Among these 7 provincial regions, Zhejiang and Hainan provinces are in the east China, and others are in the west China. Simultaneously, culture and tourism census were carried out at province and prefecture levels.

By 2020, there were 11 ethnic cultural practices and expressions of intangible heritage inscribed on the UNESCO Representative List of the Intangible Cultural Heritage of Humanity, accounting for 32.35% of China’s total 34, and simultaneously, there were four ethnic intangible heritages on the UNESCO List of Intangible Cultural Heritage in Need of Urgent Safeguarding, where China’s total is 7. The State Council of the People’s Republic of China has confirmed 1557 representative projects of the National Intangible Cultural Heritage countrywide, among which there were about 809 in the ethnic minority regions.

2. PRODUCTION OF CULTURAL TOURISM PRODUCTS

Production of local cultural tourism products means transforming cultural content into consumable goods. The patterns of tourism consumption including visiting museums and local communities, watching stage play with local cultural characteristics, appreciating or participating in and experiencing local traditional convention, tasting delicious food, and buying cultural souvenir. According to the theory of industry, all that provided for tourists to consume in the tourist destination should be sorted into tourism goods, including physical product and service (Leiper, 1979). In terms of role that tourism goods play in tourism, we could regard local cultural tourism products as the core tourism products.

2.1 The Display of Local Ethnic Minority Culture

2.1.1 Natural Display of Ethnic Minority Villages and Towns

There are lots of villages and towns with Chinese ethnic minority characteristics in southwest China, such as famous Xijiang Miao Village with thousand households and Zhaoxing Dong Village with music Dong Zu Da Ge in southeast Guizhou Province, and Shangri-la in northwest Yunnan Province. These ethnic villages and towns attract tourist with their ethnic architecture and mystic customs. Tourist has access to ethnic minority’s

daily life that ethnic minority displays naturally, lodging at ethnic household, feeling ethnic culture, tasting ethnic food, as well as enjoy the eco-environment. That is to say, tourist “eats in the farmhouse” “lodges in the farmhouse” and “takes enjoyment in the farmhouse”.

2.1.2 Exhibition and Explanation in Museum

Besides the natural displays of houses with ethnic minority characteristics and their daily lives, special or comprehensive museums were built to exhibit intensively all kinds of apparatuses and tools for local ethnic minority's daily life and production. The tangible cultural heritage in museum is just displayed, but regrettably, its cultural connotation could not be understood by most of the tourists. Museum guide for visitors becomes necessary. Museum guide is a medium between cultural relics and tourist. Inevitably, museum guide's explanation to the cultural relics bears his or her own understanding, who be an interpreter. So, it is very important to write the commentary on the cultural relics, and to enhance guide's professional skill in museum.

Nowadays, China has established a system of museums arranged from national and provincial level to prefecture and county level, even to village level, and owned by the whole Chinese people or collective villagers, or individuals. By 2019, the number of registered museums was 5132 all over the country, and in 2019, visitors to the museums aggregated over 1.14 billion person-times all over the country³, near to one time per person.

In west China, many ethnic minority villages and towns built special museums with their own ethnic cultural characteristics, such as Tunpu Museum in Anshun city and Tang'an Dong Ethnic Minority Ecology Museum in Liping county in Guizhou province. These special museums are of small scale but of significant locality, and the local guides are revealers of their own ethnic culture.

2.1.3 Stage Performance

Most of ethnic minority conventions are performed on stage to tourist specifically. Necessarily, actors and actress are local resident, and they put on their own ethnic apparel, show their own daily life, including all kinds of ritual process with ethnic cultural characteristics. The core of stage performance to ethnic culture is the ethnic culture itself. Ethnic groups' stage performance mainly includes ethnic drama, music and dance, and rituals.

Stage performance is a type of encoding to ethnic culture, and tourist, whose grasp is restricted by knowledge, affecting his or her tourism utility, decodes connotation of the ethnic culture by watching show. On the other hand, in order to cater for tourist's enjoyment for higher economic profit, the designer of stage performance has a motivation to neglect authenticity of ethnic culture, that leads to misunderstand ethnic culture. Ethnic music

and drama, as two peculiar ethnic stage performances, almost are played by indigenous players with local dialect or ethnic language, such as Dong Zu Da Ge singing in Dong language and Tunpu Nuo opera singing in their own dialect in Guizhou Province. Tourists could hardly know these two local languages, weakening these ethnic arts' attraction. Nowadays, the performance group translates or interprets orally at the intervals of playing, or show the content on the electronic screen simultaneously, in Chinese or English, helping tourists know the connotation of stage performance. Meanwhile, modern value, contemporary celebrities, and significant events are playing in the forms of ethnic arts, substituting traditional performed content to improve attraction of ethnic culture.

Scholars, especially anthropologists, have a suspicion on stage performance of ethnic culture, namely, staged authenticity (MacCannell, 1973), who declared that stage performance of life convention and ritual process could destroy cultural authenticity, and affect protection and inheritance of culture, especially ancient ethnic culture.

By 2019, the number of registered venues for artistic performance was 2716, respectively, and the number of registered organizations for artistic performance was 17795, all over the country. In 2019, the visitors to museums and theaters aggregated over 1.27 billion person-times, equivalent to one time per person.

2.2 Ethnic Traditional Crafts and Craftwork

Under the shocks of industrialization and modernization, as more and more ethnic minority crafts are disappearing from sight, it is tourism, especially cultural tourism that saves them. Displaying the ethnic craft skill and selling ethnic craftwork are important tourism sector. We could say this is “producing in displaying, displaying in producing”. The tourism demand to ethnic crafts and craftworks gives craftsman the economic profit, provoking ethnic craftsman to perform craft and produce craftwork, and youth to learn traditional craft.

For tourists who carry out ethnic cultural tourism, ethnic craftwork, one of important tourism souvenirs, bears their understanding and memory to ethnic destinations. For ethnic craftwork, authenticity is its spirit. Meanwhile, producing craftwork with ethnic cultural characteristics endows creation to ethnic craftsman. Creation means building a bridge between ethnic culture and modern society. Ethnic traditional craft could be used to produce ethnic traditional craftwork and modern craftwork.

3. DUTIES OF STAKEHOLDERS

Facing tourism market, the adaptive exploitation of ethnic minority culture involves miscellaneous stakeholders, including governments at all levels, local celebrities, firms for cultural tourism products, and scholars for studying ethnic culture.

³ Data source: 2020 China Statistical Yearbook, <http://www.stats.gov.cn/tjsj/ndsj/2020/indexch.htm>. The same below.

3.1 Governments' Duties at All Level

Central government and provincial government should draw up laws, regulations and rules for protection and development of ethnic culture. On December 12, 1985, China had access to the Convention Concerning the Protection of the World Cultural and Natural Heritage (1972), and in 2004, to Convention for the Safeguarding of the Intangible Cultural Heritage (2003). Chinese governments at all level always forbid blasphemy and bad development to ethnic culture. China released Law on the Protection of Cultural Relics (1982, amended many times), and the Intangible Cultural Heritage Law of the People's Republic of China (2011), sanctioned 3068 representative inheritors of national intangible cultural heritage provided with allowance, and the State Council and its inferior establishments reinforced concrete practice.

Local government, as both a real and direct administrator and one of beneficiaries of local tourism economy, undertakes the first direct responsibility to protect the local cultural heritage, but on the other hand, in pursuit of local economic growth and development, it might connive the destructive exploitation of cultural heritage. Local government's behavior must be supervised.

3.2 Duties of Resident and Firm

The indigenous peoples in ethnic areas are both subjects of local culture and main beneficiaries of tourism industry. Naturally and normally, they are responsible for the protection of their own culture, but increasing household income and making a good living are their substance and development rights. So, they must be instructed in the adaptive exploitation of ethnic culture.

Tourism firms, in pursuit of maximum profit, pay more attention to the exploitation of ethnic cultural heritage, without regard to protection. Governments' supervision at all level, especially local government, takes effects.

3.3 Responsibility of Tourist

Tourist's consumption is the very important phase, meaning that tourist decodes the ethnic culture, and

production realizes economic value. Tourist's utility to consume ethnic cultural tourism product relies on his or her understanding, on the other hand, on the quality of ethnic cultural tourism products provided by local people. Tourist's attitude to consume ethnic cultural tourism products might feed back to the producers, affecting producers' ideas to reconstruct the ethnic cultural connotation. So, tourist should bear respect for ethnic culture in mind.

CONCLUSION

Demand bears supply. Tourist's acceptance and purchase are the ultimate target of adaptive exploitation of ethnic minority culture. While tourism demand to ethnic culture makes local people recognize the economic value of local culture, inadequate exploitation leads certainly to cultural catastrophe. Designers and producers of ethnic cultural tourism products, on one hand, should deliver the connotation of ethnic culture and keep its authenticity, on the other hand, they should cater for modern tourist's taste and preference to ethnic cultural tourism. The adaptive exploitation of ethnic minority culture advocates "protecting in developing, and developing in protecting".

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