

## On Ethnic Village Tourism and Rural Development

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**Abstract.** This paper aims to examine the role and effects of tourism in promoting social and economic development for minority ethnic groups and rural areas within China. The research was conducted through interviews and field observation in Blang ethnic minority of Mangjing village, which is located in south-western China's Yunnan province. Starting with the characteristics of ethnic village tourism, this paper makes a detailed analysis on the tourism development in the ethnic village and concludes that promoting social and economic progress through tourism development in Chinese ethnic areas is the inevitable trend in the new era. The result suggested that the key points for promoting tourism in ethnic villages to promote social development in China are: government guidance and villagers' participation; entrepreneurship and sharing spirit; Eco-orientation and industrial integration. Finally, this paper also proposes three constructive suggestions for promoting the development of ethnic village tourism in China.

### Introduction

With the accelerated industrialization and urbanization of Chinese society, village tourism is a valued activity for urban residents' leisure and holiday consumption. This phenomenon has attracted increasing amounts of attention and become a new focus in the development and transformation of ethnic areas in China. Previous literature identifies matured villages which are already developed and are already recognized as tourist locations [1], and tourism is always utilized as a tool for economic and social development in poor rural regions [2]. Some studies also show that tourism is responsible for huge social, economic and political changes for both ethnic minority peoples and landscapes [3]. However, we know little about how these ethnic villages develop tourism in the remote rural area and win predominance in severe market competition as they are entering the industry far later than other competitors. Therefore, the exploration of tourism development is of great strategic significance to improving the life quality and industrial structure adjustment in China's ethnic rural area.

### Research Design

In the existing literature, little attention has been paid to the later developed ethnic villages. And it also has exposed many problems in the tourism development of developed villages, among which are ecological environment destruction, unequal economic benefit assignment and the weakening of the national cultural identity. In view of this, post-developed ethnic villages strive to reconstruct the post-rural social order, pursue ethnic harmony and sustainable development of villages, which is more significant and valuable for the development in modern culture and society. Therefore, this study focuses on the latter kind of ethnic villages. This study selected Mangjing Village of Pu'er in Yunnan province as the case study site.

Mangjing Village is located in the core of "Jingmai thousand-year ten-thousand mu cultivated ancient teagarden" and has the most well-preserved artificial cultivated ancient tea garden in the world. It is the root of the world tea culture and is known as the "tea culture and history museum." There are 2,563 Blang people in the Village, accounting for 91.6% of the total population. It attracts a large number of tourists and tour groups to travel here and shows a good momentum of tourism

development. This study was based on deep interviews and extensive fieldwork with Blang people living in the Mangjing Village. These people were chosen because they were born locally and are the tourism service provider and have direct interaction with tourists, so they are well informed about the local culture and customs as well as some aspects of the tourism. The results are presented in three sections, one about the overview and characteristics, the second details tourism path development regarding the performances in Mangjing village, and the last one describe the practical implications of ethnic tourism development.

### **Overview and Characteristics of Tourism Development in Mangjing Village**

In the social and economic development of this new era, Mangjing Village also chose to boom the tourism industry and retain its uniqueness.

#### **Village Concept: Tradition and Characteristics**

Mangjing Village is located in Lancang County, Pu'er City, Yunnan Province, with an area of 89.58 square kilometers. There are 695 households and 2,799 people, among whom are 2,563 Blang people. The village has jurisdiction over Manghong, Mangjing, Mangjing Shangzhai, Mangjing Xiazhai, Wengji, Wengwa, and Na Nai. Wengji has the reputation of “Millennium Ancient Village,” and it is Blang ancestors’ and their clansmen’s site when they migrated. Until today, this village still retains rich original features, beautiful natural scenery, and complete ecological culture. In 2014, it was named and listed in the first batch of “Chinese ethnic minority villages” by the State Ethnic Affairs Commission. This modern milestone event can not only effectively expand the brand influence and radiation of ethnic minority village, but also contribute to promoting the demonstration role of ethnic minority villages in protection and development. It is the greatest affirmation and inheritance of the traditional and unique national culture of ethnic villages in the new era and also lays a foundation for the development of tourism in villages.

#### **Space Environment: Harmony and Vitality**

Mangjing Village is located in the mountainous and semi-mountainous areas. It has unique climatic conditions, with an average annual temperature of 18-20 degree Celsius and a frost-free period of 345 days. It is very suitable for the growth of tea, banana, sugarcane and other crops. It has the largest artificial cultivated ancient tea garden in the world. The majestic mountains and quiet villages, winding paths and fragrant tea forests, enthusiastic residents and quaint houses constitute a picture of the harmonious coexistence of human beings and nature. Walking through the space of ancient tea trees and virgin forests, visitors will be surprised to discover the modernization and commercialization of the villages—WiFi, hotels, inns and homestays, tea cooperatives, snack restaurants, express delivery points. Most villagers have already installed water purifiers and separate washrooms. In the evening, the local villagers will also sing and dance in the space venue near the village center. Here, tourists will soon become friends with the villagers. The villagers will be skilled in using WeChat to keep long-term contact with the tourists and share their life photos, village activities and Pu'er tea sales information in the WeChat Moments. In short, Mangjing Village is a constantly developing village, which embodies a harmonious and vigorous space.

#### **Tourism Resources: Protection and Activation**

Mangjing Village has rich tourism resources. It is located in the core area of “thousand-year ten-thousand mu cultivated ancient tea garden” and is praised as “Tea Culture History Museum.” It has the best preserved artificial cultivated ancient tea garden in the world as the root of the world tea culture. The village tourism resources are mostly related to traditional cultures, such as world tea ancestor’ taming tea site, world tea ancestors’ tribe ruins, Wengji ancient village. The essence of the exploitation and utilization of the above-mentioned tourism resources is also to discover and explore the traditional cultural value of the village. To this end, Mangjing Village officially launched the application for world cultural heritage work in June 2010. In summary, the methods of

development and utilization of tourism resources reflects the essence of the Mangjing Village culture, which is to both protect and activate the region.

### **Analysis of Tourism Development Path in Mangjing Village**

With its good ecological environment, unique ethnic culture and rich tourism resources, Mangjing Village has created a great attraction for tourists, and ethnic village tourism has developed with the trend.

### **Government Guidance and Villagers' Participation**

The government attaches great importance to the development planning and the improvement of residents' living standards in Mangjing Village. However, from previous experience, the "top-down" planning system is prone to mistakes and errors in practice, and it is also likely to hinder the village residents from exerting their potential [4]. The support from the tourist destination community and the goodwill of its residents have always been considered to be the key elements of tourism success and sustainable development [5]. Only with their support and participation, can the village further develop and flourish. However, ethnic villagers often lack clear and long-term understanding of the village development. Therefore, based on the previous development experience, Mangjing Village has determined the model of "government guidance plus villager's participation." The government mainly conducts guidance from the aspect of industrial development, residential landscape and infrastructure construction, aiming to break the act of one's own free will in the development, encourage villagers to participate in the development and construction of villages, and mobilize the villagers' awareness of the protection and excavation of traditional culture in tourism development. At the same time, the government has also strengthened its connection with social organizations, obtained external support and provided guarantees for stimulating the vitality of the internal development of the village, and finally realized the healthy and sustainable development of the ethnic village.

### **Entrepreneurship and Sharing Spirit**

Pursuing innovative, coordinated, green, open and shared development is the strategy, direction and focus on China's future society. Sharing conception calls for everyone's participation, effort and enjoyment, aiming to solve social fairness and justice problems, and share the material and spiritual civilization achievements with all people, so that everyone can gain more sense of identity, satisfaction, accomplishment, security, and happiness. With this development idea, shared tourism accommodation emerged in Mangjing village. Villagers started their own businesses in an open and inclusive attitude. They share their life and production space with the tourists: cook for the guests from afar, accompany the guests to watch the sunrise and clouds, climb the mountain, drink tea, chat together, etc. Through the interaction in the sharing, the villagers pass on the enthusiasm to the tourists, making up for the low satisfaction experience caused by the inconvenient geographical location, thus creating an unforgettable and enjoyable experience for tourists. In this tourism entrepreneurship process, villagers are real participants, they create employment opportunities. Driven by the realization of self-value and sense of achievement, this mode enables the village to truly have a hematopoietic function and realize sustainable and regenerative development.

### **Eco-orientation and Industrial Integration**

Tea is the main source of economic income for local villagers. It is also the main and characteristic industry for Mangjing Village. In the development of tea industry, villagers always adhere to the concept of ecological priority. They formulated the village regulations and clearly stated that no pesticides, no chemical fertilizers, and no foliar fertilizers are allowed in the ancient tea plantation. If there is any violation, it will not go without reprimand. At the same time, Mangjing Village also attaches great importance to the ecological protection of the tea growing environment, even garbage classification, wastewater, household septic tank management has clear rules and regulations. In addition, to ensure that the environment where tea grows is minimally

polluted, Mangjing Village deliberately built a stone road. Tea, harvested entirely on fertile soil and good ecological environment, is a pure natural green product, which has won the world's love and praise and established a good brand image of pu'er tea. The tourism industry with the reputation of "sunrise industry" and "smoke-free industry" is a strategic emerging industry in China's social and economic development in this new era. Its integration with the stable tea industry development has integrated many emerging industrial formats and product forms to Mangjing Village and has also had an incredibly positive effect on the development and popularity of the local culture. We must realize simple sightseeing can no longer meet the contemporary tourists' requirements, juxtaposingly, the cultural value of the tea industry can meet tourists' pursuit of spiritual culture, and activities such as tea picking and tea tasting can satisfy the needs of tourists' participation experience. Therefore, the integration of the tea industry and the tourism industry to achieve industrial integration has a clear joint effect on the development of Mangjing Village. In recent years, through increasing external publicity and effectively integrating resources internally, a working group on scenic area construction has been established to realize the brand value of Pu'er ancient tea in the process of protecting the ecosystem and local ethnic traditional culture, and to make it a national 5A scenic spot.

### **Research Implications**

Mangjing Village is currently dominated by free independent tourists, and the number of tour groups is also increasing, indicating a trend of development for the village. Summarizing the characteristics and path of tourism development, it can provide some experience and practical enlightenment for the development of post-development ethnic village tourism.

### **Government Support, Cultural Consciousness**

The rapid development of Mangjing village cannot be separated from the strong support of the government. Under the guidance of national, provincial and municipal policies and plans of supporting the development of ethnic minorities with a small population, Mangjing Village made a strategic decision and clarified its development direction with its actual situation. In recent years, under the leadership of governments at all levels, Mangjing Village has become a key target in the construction of the tourist attractions of Pu'er Green Triangle Tourist Circle Scenic Spots, and has been honored as "spiritual highland of Pu'er tea" and "the pilgrimage site of the tea ancestors." At the same time, the government also attaches great importance to the propaganda report on Mangjing. Major news media such as CCTV and Phoenix TV have had propaganda columns on Mangjing.

Furthermore, the government has also increased the capital investment and infrastructure improvement of Mangjing construction, built the Jingmai Airport and officially opened on May 2017, creating a new platform for the outside world to understand Mangjing and come to Mangjing. In the process of frequent interaction with tourists, Blang people's "my family" consciousness has been gradually strengthened, and their unique cultural symbols such as Blang fireplace has been awakened. Many kinds of traditional ethnic activities are steadily flourishing. In return, the cultural consciousness has further enhanced the sense of place attachment, national identity and national pride of Mangjing people, which becomes the driving force of sustainable development.

### **Warm Hospitality, Sheer Endeavor**

Experience usually includes positive emotions that are pleasant, refreshed, and satisfied, as well as negative emotions like disappointed. Some scholar argued that emotion is the core of the tourism experience [6], as it is accompanied by the whole process of tourism activities, and has an important influence on the choice of tourists' destinations [7] and post-consumption behaviors [8]. The residents in Mangjing Village actively participate in tourism activities and services with their sincerity and enthusiasm. In interaction, these residents won tourists' high appreciation because of their hospitality. Tourists were deeply impressed by the residents' enthusiasm, sincerity, thoughtfulness, kindness, friendliness and moved by residents' behavior, such as solving troubles,

dining with the guests, chatting with tea, sharing knowledge, etc. Both the active participation in the tourism entrepreneurship and the enthusiastic service in interaction with tourists reflects the sheer endeavor spirit of Mangjing people.

### **Ecological and Sustainable Development**

With the advancement of industrialization and urbanization, environmental pollution and ecological destruction have become a major problem in today's society. In the rapid tourism development of many ethnic villages, the number of tourists exceeded the environmentally-capable range or the local residents' unilateral pursuit of economic benefits and ignorance of the ecological environment led to the destruction of the ecological environment [9]. In view of this, Mangjing Village adheres to the ecological priority principle from initial development stage. They take many measures to reduce pollution, among which are protecting traditional characteristic dwellings, beautifying and optimizing the village appearance, applying no chemical fertilizers or pesticides to tea plants, keeping village clean and tidy. In the process of development, ecological environment is also a type of resource. The villagers in Mangjing also ensured strict implementation of Eco-orientation in the form of laws and regulations to ensure the sustainable use of limited resources.

### **Summary**

Although the primary industry of Mangjing Village is tea, we can conclude that tourism has played an important role in promoting the development of the village from the above discussion. Under the government's guidance and support, the residents actively participated in tourism and entrepreneurship. They moved tourists with their kindness and hospitality, and inherit Blang ethnic culture through their wisdom and diligence. Tourism not only promotes the social and economic development of villages, but also changes villagers' ideology and the awakening of national culture, as well as realizes social, economic and ecological benefits.

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