

# **The Exploitation and Sustainable Development of Yunnan's Tourism Culture Resource**

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## **ABSTRACT**

Yunnan is a main tourism province where tourism resources are abundant. Apart from the natural tourism resources, ethnic culture is a kind of important tourism resources which is named tourism culture resources. During the course of the development of tourism industry, ethnic culture is being developed and integrated which is playing an important role in the development of the economics, tourism and culture. However, ethnic traditional culture should be protected in the tourism development process, in order to avoid the damage in ethnic ecological culture which resulted from the overexploitation. Optimization combination between culture and tourism should be improved by scientific conservation and rational exploitation and lead to the

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success of the sustainable development of tourism industry. Finally, during the course of sustainable development of tourism culture resources, intellectual support, financial support and systemic security should be provided by the government who will play a crucial role.

**Keywords:** *Yunnan, tourism development, tourism culture resource*

## 1. Introduction

National culture has been continuously accumulated and inherited during the long production and life of each ethnic group. With the accumulation of history, national culture becomes deeper. It can be classified into two groups: one is material culture resource; the other is spiritual culture resource. Not only does national culture accumulate the cultural creation and achievements of civilization of this ethnic group and contain the cultural gene and vital force of walking towards future, but it also possesses important value of exploitation (Li, 2004: 116). The soul of Yunnan's tourism resource is tourism culture resource, whose core is Yunnan's colorful minority culture.

There are twenty-five minorities in Yunnan, and this number tops the list in the whole China. Yunnan is a mutualism belt of multi-ethnic groups and multi-culture types which is rare in the world. In the course of the long development of history, folk dances and customs, handicraft articles, dresses and personal adornments, buildings, festivals, food and drink of different characteristics, and so on, have been formed, as well as the multicolored minority cultures. The minority culture of Yunnan is more than a kind of local one. It is closely related to other minority cultures and the cultures of the outside world. It is connected with the Tibetan Culture and the Chinese Culture, moreover, the cultures of the whole Southeast Asia and South Asia. Therefore, the respective minority cultures of Yunnan belong not only to the local place, but also to China or to the whole Orient.

For years the Provincial Government has been devoting itself to the moulding of Yunnan into a strong minority culture province. Taking tourism as the leading industry, it constantly digs minority culture resources, and integrates tourism with minority culture organically, aiming at building the tourism brand of minority culture of

unique charm, and has gathered the following successes.

## **2. Mould a demonstration area of minority culture**

In Kunming, the important transfer station of Yunnan tour, Yunnan Nationalities Village reflecting the customs and cultures of the respective minority nationalities in Yunnan has been built. It shows the tourists home and abroad the dwellings, dresses and personal adornments, songs and dances of the twenty-six nationalities in Yunnan. During the Golden Week or the festivals of some minority nationalities, some timely and occasional theme campaigns are also carried out to display the minority cultures, such as the Water-Splashing Festival of the Dai and the Third Month Fair of the Bai. In order to utilize the brand resource of the Village, extend the brand value, display the rich minority culture heritage of Yunnan, broaden the connotation of propaganda of the minority culture in the scenic region, and inherit and save the valuable minority culture resources, the Village has founded the Saving and Conservation Center of Minority Culture, introduced some folk artisans that do well in folk handicrafts and arts supported by the existing stockaded

villages and sightseeing facilities within the region, and showed the people “the Display Gallery of Exquisite Articles of Folk Handicrafts and Arts” which gives priority to conservation and display of folk handicrafts. Meanwhile, Yunnan Nationalities Village has gradually become a base for the inheritance and conservation of minority cultures as well as an important demonstration scenic spot of Yunnan’s minority culture.

Dali, in the west of Yunnan, owns affluent and solid minority culture resources and superior traffic location advantage. Adopting the idea of “Setting up the Prefecture with culture, Prosper the Prefecture with tourism”, this Prefecture plans the tourism development with cultural idea, elevates the tourism quality with the advantage in culture, updates the tourism landscape with cultural characteristic, and merges the cultural connotation deeply into urban construction. What’s more, it actively perfects the policy of cultural investors: it increases financial input and gives full play of the leading role of state-owned cultural enterprises, and meanwhile descends the market access threshold of operational cultural industry and cultural tourism project, further widens the financing

channel, actively encourages social forces to handle the cultural matter and thus forms the pluralistic cultural input system by sticking to the principle of “Who invests, who owns, who benefits”. It fully highlights the unique cultural characteristics of totally twelve folk festivals and fairs of Dali Bai Ethnic group Autonomous Prefecture like “the Third Month Fair, the Three-course Tea, Around the Three Spirits, Sea Opening and Sacrificing Festival, Rice Transplanting Fair, Dishes-serving Dance, the Torch Festival, the Ben Zhu Festival, the Nut Festival, the Shi Bao Mountain Singing Fair, the Butterflies’ Meeting”, and realizes the transformation of natural scenery sightseeing into the experience and inspiration of historical culture and folk custom. It has restored and reconstructed the grand-scale Chongsheng Temple to accelerate the development and construction of tourism infrastructure and hospitality service condition of the Chicken Foot Mountain, widen the space of tourism further and elevate the cultural content of tourism.

Beyond that, in accordance with the principle of “Of one’s own accord, of equal value, of compensation with the resource as the link”, Dali actively introduced strategic

investors to participate in the exploitation and construction of tourism resource. In consideration of the advantages of industrialized, market-oriented and scale operation of Dali Tourism Group Co. Ltd., the Prefecture Government also hands over the scenic spots like the Chongsheng Temple, the Butterfly Spring, the Battle Wizard Studio City, the Nanzhao Custom Island, and the Erhai Park to the Group to make unified management and elevate the levels of exploitation, construction, operation and management of the tourism resources. Centering on the Studio City, the Government has conducted the “cultural operation” to strengthen the exploitation and utilization and intensify the marketing by making TV plays like *The Battle Wizard* and *The Ancient Road of Tea and Horse*, which has obtained preferably economic benefits.

Besides Dali, Lijiang is also a demonstration area of minority culture that Yunnan attaches importance to its moulding. Situated in the northwest of Yunnan, Lijiang is a minority and cultural corridor where multi-nationalities live together in a compact community. As a world cultural heritage, The ancient Town of Lijiang has solid cultural details and long-term inherited civilization, which are the

core factors of the tourism attraction, and the important guarantee for the development of Lijiang's tourism industry as well. The cultural heritages in the Ancient Town of Lijiang are splendid and abundant: there are linked historic blocks, folk houses and yards, ancient building groups, and the deep intangible cultural heritages contained in the folk. As far as quality is concerned, Lijiang Ancient Town is one of the two world heritages of city-type in China at present. It represents the urban architecture of the minorities in southwest China and the model at certain specific stage of historical development. It is characterized by uniqueness and specificity with high popularity and reputation. Since the end of 1990s, the Provincial Government of Yunnan together with the Municipal Government of Lijiang has actively propelled the transformation of cultural system. Relying on the unique minority culture resource and the advantaged natural tourism resource, with the help of developmental platform of tourism, they strive to develop the cultural industry and prosper the cultural undertaking. The peoples in Lijiang have stepped on a developmental road of natural resource exploitation in combination with cultural

resource exploitation, tourism industry construction with minority culture industry, and minority culture construction with socialist market economy to mould the exquisite articles of minority culture tourism like the Old Town of Lijiang, Dongba Culture, Naxi ancient music, “the Magnificent Water and the Gold Sand”, the Moso customs, the Ancient Road of Tea and Horse, “the Impressions on Lijiang”.

The strategies of developing tourism relying on minority culture have also advanced an array of cultural enterprises which are established in local minority culture resource, exploit and operate cultural products of high minority culture contents and regional characteristics: the Dongba Valley Culture Ecological Company represented by the dig, saving, propagation and display of local minority living customs; the Yushui Stockaded Village and Dongba Deities’ Park whose theme is to conserve, inherit and propagate Dongba Culture and embody the natural and harmonious relationship between humans and nature; the rural folk culture experience projects of Huangshan, Baisha and Lashi Townships of Yulong County represented by rural folk culture tourism; the groups

running the ancient culture like “He Zhigang Study” represented by the production and operation of calligraphic works and paintings, and minority handicrafts, etc.; and some self-employed cultural producers and operators who specialize in minority culture and art display and performance, minority culture video production, minority culture film and television products, and minority literature creation. Just among the people there are five private museums established: the Bizarre Stone Museum of the Tiger Leaping Gorge, the Former Residence Museum of Baishaluoke, the Dongba Culture Museum of the Yushui Stockaded Village, the Moso Customs Museum of the Lugu Lake, and Luxue Study Museum of Private Collection. Through the integration of a variety of minority culture resources, the tourism industry in Lijiang has the cultural factors of high-content regionalism and nationalism.

In Sipsongpanna region, since the population of the Dai occupies the majority of that of the local people, and the Dai is an ethnic group which has genetic relationship with the Tai in Southeast Asian region, the card of tourism cultural resource that the government mainly plays is Dai

culture. The government tries hard to make in-depth dig of Dai-Tai culture, mould Sipsongpanna into a place for Dai-Tai ethnic groups in Southeast Asia to search roots, and make Sipsongpanna an important international tourism area.

In order to exploit the minority culture resource of Sipsongpanna at deeper level and make an effort to elevate the tourism taste of Sipsongpanna, some enterprises are practicing “minority ethnic group stockaded village tour” step by step under the encouragement of the Government<sup>2</sup>.

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<sup>2</sup> Minority nationality stockaded village tour refers to the tourist activities which take minority rural communities as the tourist destinations, the cultural phenomena and natural scenery at the destinations as the tourist attractions to experience heterogeneous culture, pursue simplicity and cleanness, and meet the psychological motivations of “seeking novelty, seeking distinctiveness, seeking happiness, seeking knowledge”. Minority stockaded village tour belongs to the category of rural tourism, but at the same time is different from the rural vacation and agricultural sightseeing tour. The subjects of its attractions can be both the natural scenery of minority nationality villages and the cultural scenery including buildings, dresses and personal adornments, diet, festivals, weddings and funerals, recreational and sports activities; they can also be the implicit cultural characteristics such as the residents’ mode of thinking, psychological feature, moral concept, and aesthetic interest. Therefore, from the appearance of the stockaded village to the rituals and customs, to the villagers themselves and their mode of production and life-style, all can become the tourist attractions of minority stockaded village tour. Its business pattern often adopts the one of company plus peasant household, namely: the peasant households in the community

The Dai Park in Sipsongpanna is a model of minority ethnic group stockaded village tour & integration of stockaded villages within the scenic region. The Park consists of five stockaded villages. With Langcang River to the west and the quiet and beautiful Longde Lake to the north, shadowed by green trees and surrounded by bamboo houses, this region presents a piece of beautiful and miraculous subtropical Dai courtyard scene. It is compared to “the most flamboyant, most dazzling plume on the tail of a peacock”, and is the “Mengbanaxi” (worldly heaven) of Dai people. The type of the cultural resources of the Dai Park scenic region is of a wide variety and rich connotation. There are stem-hurdle type buildings of Dai characteristic, unique Dai costumes, Theravada Buddhist architectural landscape and the singing and dancing performance of the Dai, of which the influential Water-Splashing Festival is an outstanding representative. (Huang Liang) These allow the tourists to have a profound experience of the village community culture, the festival

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provide the resources, while the company invests in the exploitation in the form of capital. This is a model of minority culture ecological tourism.

culture and the religious culture of the Dai. In the Park, during non-touring period of time, the villagers stay at their homes; during touring period of time, they extensively participate in it, work together, have clear assigned jobs, and each performs his own functions. The development of the tourism in the Park puts the conservation and inheritance of minority culture first. The objects of the “conservation” are widely involved, including conserving the stem-hurdle type buildings and cultural relics and historic sites of the Dai, conserving traditional Dai culture especially religious culture, retaining the natural ecological perspective of “conserve all that nature grants”, and maintaining the simple, strong atmosphere of the folk customs of the Dai. Here cultural resource is taken as a social resource at higher level. The cultures accumulated by the local people are respected and propagated, and the inheritance and development of Dai culture are paid high attention to.

In addition to the above regions, the Provincial Government is also exerting itself to mould over twenty minority culture tourism demonstration counties (cities, districts) like Yuanmou, Xiangyun, Weishan, Jianchuan,

Ninglang and Shangri-La, establish a crop of cultural tourism construction projects and push out a batch of minority culture tourism demonstration spots. In these areas all have been done to accelerate the exploitation and innovation of minority culture resource. The emphasis of construction has been put on the minority culture tourism product range whose core contents are minority culture, historical culture, religious culture, recreational and performing culture, minority handicraft and food and drink specialty, and the emphasis of exploitation on a batch of projects such as minority athletics and contests in amusement to push forward the transition and update of Yunnan's tourism and the improvement of the quality and efficiency.

### **3. Mould exquisite articles of minority culture tourism**

Moulding exquisite articles of minority culture tourism is the successful butt joint of tourism and culture in Yunnan. Through the moulding of performing articles such as “Dynamic Yunnan”<sup>3</sup>, “The Magnificent Water and

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<sup>3</sup> “Dynamic Yunnan”: The first big raw type dance medley in China, with Yang Liping as the general director and art director. It is

Gold Sand”<sup>4</sup>, “Dream of Butterflies”<sup>5</sup> and “Mengbalanaxi”<sup>6</sup>, they have become the symbolic exquisite articles of art of

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commented by dance critics as a piece of “unique” new work on the stage and creates a new variety of China’s stagecraft. The songs and dances in “Dynamic Yunnan” mainly stem from folk customs and rituals. During the whole performance, it is penetrated by such folk-custom ceremonies as deity worshipping, life and labour, festival and commemoration from the beginning to the end, of which are always included numerous contents of minority history and culture. The rituals have the important functions of awakening, memorizing, educating and inheriting minority memories. They can awaken the minority memories of modern people which are screened by urban culture and mass culture, arouse the public and social concern, inherit and conserve the minority and folk cultures, and call them to return to the native soil, return to nature.

<sup>4</sup> “The Magnificent Water and Gold Sand” selects the most representative cultural images of the minority nationalities in Lijiang. It is expressed in the form of dances, poems and paintings, and thus becomes another bright spot of the Old Town of Lijiang that attracts the tourists. In such forms, it assembles the unique minority cultural spirits of northwestern Yunnan bred by Lijiang’s wondrous landscapes and the eternal and extremely brilliant cultural treasures of Ancient Naxi Kingdom. It presents in all dimensions the unique and broad and profound minority cultures and spirits.

<sup>5</sup> “Dream of Butterflies” is a large performance of songs and dances of dreamlike feelings pushed out by Dali Tourism Group. With the unique Dali “butterfly” culture running through it, it assembles the scenes and folk customs of Dali and even Yunnan. The combination of various classic and modern songs and dances displays the evolution of Dali culture in all ages.

<sup>6</sup> “Mengbalanaxi” is a large song and dance evening party with Banna’s folk custom as its theme. Using modern means of artistic expression, it reproduces the unique natural resource and cultural resource there: it reveals with songs and dances the famous folklores and folk customs and festivals, and thus presents Banna’s folk customs of infinite glamour.

Yunnan Province and have formed the characteristic brands of key tourist destinations and thus the butt joint of culture and tourism, of product and market have been successfully realized. These excellent articles attract tourists of China and the world to Yunnan, and direct them to the tourist attractions of Yunnan, which effectively improves the cultural tourism image of Yunnan.

#### **4. Show the advantage of minority culture resource to domestic and overseas people**

In order to push Yunnan's minority culture to the world, propel the construction of Yunnan as a strong prince of minority culture, and accelerate the development of minority culture industry, the first High Class Symposium on strong minority culture province was held in Yunnan in 1999. The participants were experts and scholars as well as heads of the consortiums from twelve countries, including governmental officials like America's vice Secretary of State. They thought highly of Yunnan's construction strategy of "a strong minority culture province" and considered it an extraordinary pioneer work even in the global. They jointly issued the *Proposals on*

*Yunnan*, suggesting taking Yunnan as a “global demonstration area of sustainable development of minority culture, ecological environment and social economy”. In August 2000, the second High Class Symposium and Kunming travel mart were held in Kunming at the same time. After that, The travel Mart is held in Kunming every year. Besides, all kinds of international tourism culture festivals are held in Yunnan. The numerous activities will not only attract tourists at home and abroad, facilitate Yunnan’s foreign communication, increase the cultural connotations of tourism, and propagate Yunnan’s minority culture, but also strengthen a sense of national pride of the vast Yunnan people, and play an active role in their conscious conservation of minority culture.

Yet in the course of Yunnan’s taking minority culture resource as tourism culture resource and exploiting it, several problems still exist in spite of some achievements made in this respect.

Firstly, insufficient conservation leads to serious loss of cultural resource. Within tourism regions, the deep exploitation of tourism and the frequent going in-and-out of the tourists allow the minority areas to communicate with

the external society, and arouse the local people's desire to communicate with the outside world. Their initial wonder and looking on at the culture of the external society are gradually changed into approval and assimilation. Especially the young generation, their assimilation of "fashion" appears more rapid. Now in the homes of some villagers of minority stockaded villages, the photomurals of many famous singers, soccer stars and movie stars are seen to be put up here and there. The influence of such "input" of modern culture on people's cognitive competence of the community in minority areas and the value system of the leading culture is direct and realistic (Guo, 2007: 34). The existence of tourists also teach them how to seek economic benefits, how to dig the things that can make money, and how to search the useful cultural elements, while those irrelevant to economic benefits are abandoned invisibly. For example, in Sipsongpanna region, within the areas where minority stockaded village tour has not been conducted and developed, especially those areas quite close to the city center of Jinghong, more and more people of the young generation do not wear Dai costumes. Lots of traditional stem-hurdle-type built (Dai bamboo chamber) residences in

Dai stockaded villages have been replaced by bungalows of brick-wood panel structure of Chinese style and storied buildings of armoured concrete structure. The original cooking culture of the Dai was fairly unique, with its foods famous for being sour, hot and fragrant, and taking uncooked food, glutinous food and barbecues as the principal things; as to the package of food, it mainly adopted faint-scented Musa leaves, and the house furnishings for dinner were bamboo table and bamboo stool. However, the Dai flavor restaurants in Jinghong City are turning neither Chinese nor Dai. The kind of Dai diet culture of strong characteristics and original taste has already been hard to find. As to the tourist souvenirs at the market of tourist characteristic products, the ones of really local minority culture characteristics and of fairly high cultural flavor are seldom seen. Those that glut the market are mainly tourist souvenirs purchased from other places (Yang, 2001: 22).

Secondly, the management of tourism regions is not good enough, and the policies on tourism exploitation and sustainable development are unable to be practiced. In some tourism regions, the problems of valuing exploitation while

neglecting conservation and valuing economic benefits while neglecting social benefits deserve our attention. Unreasonable utilization and exploitation of tourism resources as well as extensive operation of the scenic regions will destroy the ecological environment of the sightseeing place and damage the minority culture to some degree. For example, in a natural karst cave in Gengma County of Lincang region, there is a cavern called “Stone Buddha Cavern”. It is not only a relic of Neolithic period, but also a place where the local minorities conduct religious activities. Nevertheless, in order to exploit tourism, the County invested 1,500,000 Yuan to open the cave by exploding the rocks, set up the electric wires and build roads, thus destroying the cultural layer of the relic and the original appearance of the cave. In the market-oriented exploitation of minority culture, a lot of cultural relics like ancient books, handicrafts and religious activities preserved in the folk were purchased or stolen by strangers by all means. For example, in Lijiang region, the market-oriented exploitation of Dongba Culture has already resulted in the purchase of valuable Dongba ancient books, calligraphic works and paintings, and

Buddhist instruments preserved in the folk by strangers, even Dongba cultural relics collected by research institutes were stolen. The number of the loss of cultural relics is shocking. Even the basic literal materials inheriting Dongba Culture in some Naxi mountain areas are unable to be found. If such condition continues, the exploitation of Dongba Culture will not be protective, but destructive.

Therefore, in view of the above problems that minority culture faces, the government should provide corresponding intellectual and financial support, as well as systemic guarantee. Stimulating the “cultural awareness” of the local nationalities and propagate traditional culture cannot do without the government’s encouragement of the experts and scholars to offer intellectual support to the cultural owners of minorities areas to let them learn earlier the usefulness of traditional culture to their own society. Minority culture education should be strengthened to let the minorities have deeper knowledge of the value and significance of their own cultures, and thus they can return to dig and conserve their own traditional culture, that is to say, make traditional culture both economically and socially useful. In this way can traditional culture be

inherited. The government should boost the rapid economic development of minority areas and offer them financial security to make the people jump out of the “trap of low-degree cultural exploitation”. This is a kind of effective approach for traditional minority culture to be conserved. Moreover, legal system should be reinforced to provide legal security for the conservation of minority cultural heritage. Practically strengthen the conservation and management of minority culture resource through legislation and provide systemic security for the conservation. Only scientific conservation and reasonable exploitation can optimize the combination of culture and tourism constantly, make them promote and benefit from each other so as to achieve sustainable development of tourism industry.

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