

Research on Ethnic Tourism and Acculturation in Ethnic Society: the Case of an Ethnic Minority Group in the Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region, Southwestern China

Doctoral Course in Regional Management

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1. Background of the Research

From the implementation of the policies of reform and opening up to that of the Western Development policy, China had great expectations of the development of tourism in the areas inhabited by ethnic minorities in terms of economic advancement and modernization of its inland areas. Therefore, ethnic tourism began to spread across the whole nation in the early 1980s. In particular, ethnic tourism in Yunnan Province has created substantial economic benefits. In the areas inhabited by ethnic minorities in Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region, a province neighboring Yunnan Province, ethnic tourism, where the traditional cultures and lifestyles of the ethnic minorities like the *Zhuang* and the *Yao* are developed as tourism resources, have also been revitalized.

Ethnic tourism makes use of traditional ethnic cultures to boost the economy; it is vigorously popularized to acquire tremendous economic benefits, help ethnic minorities reduce poverty, and accelerate the development of ethnic society. Nevertheless, the development of ethnic tourism has caused cultural commercialization and difficulty in the preservation of traditional cultures though it has improved the life of ethnic minorities. In other words, modernization and tourism development have brought many foreign cultures, which has resulted in the problem of the coexistence of foreign and traditional cultures; meanwhile, tourism development has had an impact on the identity of ethnic minorities, and there is a risk that the ethnic identity will disappear.

2. Purpose of the Research

With the case of ethnic tourism in the areas inhabited by ethnic minorities in Hechi, Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region in Southwest China, this paper aims to explore the acculturation brought by ethnic tourism to ethnic society.

3. Method of Research

To realize the research purpose, this paper analyzed previous studies to summarize the background of the development of ethnic tourism and found problems in such development. By probing into relevant historical cultures and the local ethnography, I became acquainted with the traditional cultures and historical development of the research subjects. With these research theories, I conducted a field investigation into the current situation of Hechi where the subjects live. Moreover, a questionnaire survey was adopted to analyze the effect of the development of ethnic tourism on the ethnic awareness of the local ethnic minority groups. Additionally, I interviewed the local residents to understand their attitudes towards the development of ethnic tourism.

The details about the field investigation are as follows: From August 20 to September 10, 2014, the first survey was conducted in the areas inhabited by ethnic minorities in Hechi, with emphasis on the historical and tourism-oriented development of the Bronze Drum Culture. Meanwhile, I investigated tourism-oriented development of the cultures and festivals of the ethnic minorities against the backdrop of the development of ethnic tourism. From May 21 to June 10 and from July 13 to 23, 2015, the second and third surveys were conducted respectively, with a focus on the tourism resources and pseudo-events of traditional festivals against with the backdrop of the development of ethnic tourism. From February 3 to March 3 and from August 8 to 23, 2016, the fourth and fifth field investigations were made respectively. Both investigations laid emphasis on the reality of the traditional festivals that the *Yao* people had carried forward for 100 years. In addition, I interviewed Meng Ling, a representative of the research on the *Yao* culture and probed into the tourism-oriented development of the traditional festivals of the *Yao* people. Also, the large-scale performance called Dream in Bama, which was set in a natural landscape, was investigated. The sixth field investigation started on April 28 and ended on May 21, 2017. During the investigation, I explored the places where the Zhu Zhu Festivals of the *Yao* people was held and got acquainted with the current situation of the festival through interviews with the *Yao* people.

4. Result of the Research

This dissertation is comprised of an Introduction, Part I and Part II. In the Introduction, I elaborated on the background of this study, the research problem, the previous academic achievements, the research purpose and method, the theories, and the structure of this

dissertation.

In Part I, I described the changes to the population and the distribution of the Chinese ethnic minorities, analyzed the previous academic studies on the *Zhuang* and *Yao* peoples, and introduced the traditional festivals and architectural culture of the two peoples. Then, I probed into the concept, implementation and economic benefits of the Western Development policy as well as its effects on ethnic minorities. To delve into the ethnic tourism in Southwest China, I analyzed the development of ethnic tourism in Yunnan Province, Guizhou Province and Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region. Finally, I provided an overview of the natural and cultural tourism resources of the ethnic minorities in Hechi, Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region, and analyzed the tourism-oriented development of the traditional cultures of the ethnic minorities in the tourism development of Hechi during the implementation of the Western Development policy. With the above efforts, I have come to the following conclusions: (1) the implementation of the Western Development policy has significantly accelerated the infrastructure and tourism of Hechi; (2) tourism-oriented development of the traditional cultures of ethnic minorities has not only pushed forward the regional economy but also helped improve the life of ethnic minorities; (3) with the development of tourism and the penetration of the market economy, the tourism development mode, which centers around the traditional cultures of ethnic minorities, has become universal; (4) while the utilization of the traditional cultures of ethnic minorities has boosted economic development, it has caused the disappearance of traditional cultures and environmental pollution.

According to the issues mentioned in Part I, I paid attention to the effect of modernization on ethnic minorities and defined the impact of tourism development on the ethnic society in Part II. Furthermore, I discussed the relationship between ethnic tourism and the protection of traditional ethnic cultures from the perspective of regional operation and management. The research result is as follows: First, I explored the effect of the tourism development of ethnic minorities on the Zhu Zhu Festival of the *Pu Nu Yao* in Hechi. With the support of the government, the Zhu Zhu Festival was developed as a tourism resource and gradually evolved into a major ceremony, attracting a great number of tourists. But at the same time, it has resulted in the commercialization of the ethnic traditional culture, and the original meaning of the festival has begun to be weakened. Worse still, the decoration of the bronze drums and the disorder of the old and new bronze drums behind the stage have deprived the bronze drums of the original religious meaning.

Second, the Bronze Drum Culture of the *Pu Nu Yao* has changed under the influence of

the tourism policies. Based on the results of the questionnaire survey for the festival participants, I discussed the relationship between the change and the ethnic identity of ethnic minorities. The research results are as follows: First, although most of the *Pu Nu Yao* people don't have a bronze drum or keep the habit of playing bronze drum in daily life, they are still aware that bronze drum is an important ethnic cultural heritage. Second, the local people have developed the idea of showing performances to tourists, which has made the ethnic traditional culture more commercial and weakened the original meaning of the bronze drum and offering sacrifices to ancestors. Due to the proposal of the *Yao* researchers, the *Yao* people have re-discovered the meaning of Da Nu Festival or Er Jiu Festival, which was initially irrelevant to the *Yao* people, and re-defined its religious meaning. However, the festival was named as the Zhu Zhu Festival, which demonstrates the ethnic identity. Because of frequent exchange with others and the tourism-oriented development of the Bronze Drum Culture, the festival has lost its original meaning. It is also found that the ethnic identity of the *Yao* people has changed. For the *Yao* people who have been living a modern life, the celebration of the Zhu Zhu Festival has been regarded as an effective way to preserve the Bronze Drum Culture as the practice of playing the bronze drum has gradually disappeared. The festival has separated the Bronze Drum Culture from its religious background; it has been preserved as a traditional art rather than as a festival.

Third, I compared the Bronze Drum Culture of the *Pu Nu Yao* with that of the *Zhuang* to explore the tourism-oriented development of traditional festivals. The research results are as follows:

First, I made a comparison of the Bronze Drum Culture between the *Pu Nu Yao* and the *Zhuang* and described the features of the bronze drum. The development of the economy and modern civilization has had significant influence on the Bronze Drum Culture: the bronze drum has been played on a less regular basis and the number of people who can play the bronze drum has become ever smaller. Many young people have chosen to work in a city away from home; hence, they have fewer opportunities to play the bronze drum. Fascinated by modern entertainment culture, they have lost interest in the bronze drum.

Second, I analyzed the Bronze Drum Culture in the Bronze Drum Folk Music Festival, the Zhu Zhu Festival of the *Pu Nu Yao*, and the Maguai Festival of the *Zhuang* in Hechi and found that the tourism-oriented development of the Bronze Drum Culture has attracted many tourists and created great economic benefits. Due to the cultural policies by the government and the penetration of the market economy, the practice of playing the

bronze drum in daily life among ethnic minorities has been changed, and so has the Bronze Drum Culture. With a lower economic status, the ethnic minorities in Southwest China lag far behind the Han people in terms of economy and culture, and continual friction is inevitable in the communication between them. As the bronze drum cultures of the *Zhuang* and the *Yao* have been developed towards tourism with the national preferential policies and have been separated from daily life and become entertainment-oriented, the original meaning of the cultures have been weakened. Therefore, attention must be paid to the preservation of the original meaning of traditional festivals in tourism development.

Aside from analyzing the tourism-oriented development of traditional culture of the *Bai Ku Yao*, I pointed out problems in the process. The development started in 2000. In the past 16 years, it has created tremendous economic benefits, but it is still regarded as the being in the early stages of tourism development. As the development could generate social and economic benefits in this stage, the government strongly advocated it and participated in it as an enterprise. Moreover, I found that the government was active to attract investment from external enterprises and strengthened enterprise management, which greatly fueled the development of local communities. Nonetheless, the government did not pay adequate attention to the negative effects of the development on the local natural, social and cultural environment. Worse still, tourism development has brought economic benefits, so many of the villagers strongly support the tourism-oriented development of traditional cultures. Under the influence of modernization and tourism development, the agriculture-oriented economic structure of the *Bai Ku Yao* has changed into a service-oriented one, and the social and economic structure has been changing rapidly. In the local community, the government is enhancing the protection of traditional cultures while boosting tourism development. With the penetration of the market economy and tourism development, local residents have begun thinking of putting their business ideas into practice, which has resulted in frequent commercialization of traditional cultures.

Finally, I investigated the impact of the huge influx of tourists into the areas inhabited by ethnic minorities on the traditional culture of the *Pu Nu Yao*. Specifically, I made a comparison in the design, abrasive resistance, production, dressing, seasonal feature, color collocation, decorative pattern and symbolic meanings of the costumes of the *Pu Nu Yao* before and after the tourism-oriented development. The research result is as follows: the production of folk customs has changed due to the penetration of modern design culture. This has been confirmed. Meanwhile, the popularity of ready-made garments and excessive beautification of clothing styles has weakened the original meaning of costume. Then, I probed into the effect of tourism development on the architectural culture of the

Pu Nu Yao. Specifically, the implementation of the Plan of Renovating the Traditional Thatched Houses by the government has led to the rebuilding or destruction of many traditional buildings. Worse still, transportation development and the great influx of tourists have quickened the disappearance of the traditional cultures of the villages along the road; tourism development and the commercialization of traditional festivals have been depriving traditional festivals of their original meaning.

Modernization and the penetration of the market economy have promoted the development of the social civilization of the *Yao*, but they have also accelerated the destruction of the traditional *Yao* culture. Therefore, I explored the effect of tourism development and modernization on the traditional cultures of ethnic minorities to discuss the relationship between tourism development and modernization. The research result is as follows: I do not believe that modernization is something disadvantageous for people living in rural areas, but it is true that it has caused many problems, such as the disappearance of the traditional folk music and dance, the oversimplification of ceremonies of traditional festivals, a lack of the inheritors of traditional handicrafts and folk medicine, the reduction of ethnic buildings, and the decline of traditional customs. We cannot neglect the impact of modernization on traditional cultures, but there is a new factor which influences them -- tourism development. The above problems are caused by modernization which drives young people to work away from home and thus leads to an ever smaller population in rural areas. But it is often seen that many young migrant workers have returned for work thanks to the large number of job opportunities brought by tourism development. Therefore, promoting tourism development will effectively alleviate the reduction in the population of local communities and increase the number of traditional cultural inheritors. It is true that tourism development is an effective way to protect traditional cultures; however, tourism development has also caused some problems, including the loss of the authenticity of traditional cultures and the commercialization of traditional cultures.

Finally, I elaborated on the balanced development of ethnic tourism and urban planning according to the relationship between society, environment and economy. To develop tourism, the ethnic minorities in Guangxi Zhuang Autonomous Region repaired and maintained the buildings of primitive villagers, and many buildings were transformed into souvenir stores or restaurants, which has attracted a large quantity of tourists and created economic benefits. Nevertheless, tourism enterprises only spend a small sum of the earnings brought by tourism development on maintaining the local environment. This indicates that the environment has received inadequate protection. As tourism develops,

some villages of ethnic minorities have become conscious that traditional cultures are important cultural heritages. But due to restrictions on education, such traditional ceremonies or customs and other cultural heritages have not been well popularized, and a value consensus has not been reached. Moreover, I believe that more earnings brought by tourism should be spent on the protection of the environment. Most importantly, local residents should take part in traditional cultural activities dominated by the government and enterprises.