

**Tourism as a Catalyst for Intercultural Communication---
Changes among the Minorities of Longsheng County
旅游成为跨文化交流的催化剂---龙胜县少数民族的变化**

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ABSTRACT

This paper studies the social economic changes among the minorities of Longsheng County of Guilin Municipality in South China. The Longsheng Minorities Autonomous County is 100 kilometers northwest of Guilin, where live the Miaos, Yaos, Dongs and Zhuangs, with a total population of 167,000. In 2000, the county received 285,000 home and overseas tourists; tourism revenue reached 29 million Yuan (RMB). The exposure to western cultures due to the influx of foreign visitors has led to drastic changes in the lifestyle, behavior and values among the minorities; their old culture tradition is facing a severe challenge. In examining the various factors that catalyze the social economic changes, the author proposed measures to avoid imbalance in the process of intercultural adaptation. It is hoped that this paper will arouse the cultural self-awareness of the minority people so that their culture heritage can survive in a modern society.

INTRODUCTION

As a catalyst, tourism plays a multi-functional role in global intercultural communication. In many developing countries, tourism has become an important source for generating employment and increasing foreign exchange earnings, thereby improving the balance of payment. The economic benefit is best understood as “a gross increase in the wealth or income measured in monetary terms.” On the other hand, intercultural exchange is probably the greatest social value of tourism. Seeing and experiencing another country exposes the traveler to different political, religious and economic systems. As a result, mutual understanding between the guest and host is enhanced, which is conducive to promoting world peace. However, tourism also produces complex socioeconomic impacts, contributing to changes in value systems, individual

behaviors, family relations, collective lifestyles, traditional ceremonies and community organizations.

In the new millennium, international tourism is gaining momentum all over the world. In this context, China as a developing country is catching up to the tide. In 2001, the country received 11.2 million foreign tourists, ranking 5th in the world. One reason why China attracts so many overseas pilgrims lies in that it has the oldest uninterrupted civilization in the world and rich cultural resources. With 56 ethnic groups, China is a big family. With the development of ethnic tourism, the culture heritage of the minority peoples is becoming the bright spot. And an increasing number of western tourists are captivated by the natural conditions and unique customs of the minorities. This offers a golden chance for economic development in the poverty-stricken minority regions, but also poses a severe challenge to their traditional lifestyle, norms, values, and beliefs.

This paper deals with the socioeconomic changes in the minorities of Longsheng County under Guilin Municipality, which is a celebrated tourist resort in South China. It explores the historic cultural transformations in four parts: First, the conditions of Longsheng County before mass tourism; second, the tourism development in three typical minority villages; third, the sociocultural changes in these minority communities; finally the control measures to be taken to avoid the negative consequences in cross-cultural communication.

I. Tourism Spurs the Economic Development of Longsheng County

The Longsheng Minorities Autonomous County is a well-known tourist destination in South China, 100 kilometers northwest of Guilin City. This mountainous county covers an area of 2,470 km² and is home to a colorful mixture of Zhuang, Miao, Yao and Dong minorities, with a population of 167,000. For centuries, the high mountains were natural barriers to communication between the minorities and the Han Chinese who make up about 93 percent of the total population. The isolation made it possible for the minorities to preserve their unique religion, customs, lifestyle and architecture. Longsheng is a rare example of four minorities living in compact communities but carrying out their unique cultures, exemplified by the folk songs of the Zhuangs, the unique wedding customs of the Yaos, the religious ceremonies of the Miaos, and the Lusheng (a reed-pipe wind instrument) dance of the Dongs. All these minority cultures have become invaluable resources for developing tourism.

But before mass tourism started in the early 1990s, the county was designated as a poverty county by the central government. According to an official investigation involving 50 poverty-stricken villages in 1986, the lowest per capita income in this minority county was 77 Yuan (\$9.5 US), the highest,

262 Yuan (\$33 US). To get rid of poverty and invigorate the local economy, the county government put forward the strategy of “developing ethnic tourism” in 1993 and a “Five-Year Plan for Tourism Development” was drafted. (Before it, the county had just opened the Ailing Hot Spring, which could only manage home travelers in small batches.) The County Tourism Administration made a study of its cultural heritage and decided to develop four typical minority villages for mass tourism (Table 1).

The modernization of infrastructure is a pre-condition for developing tourism. To improve the transportation, telecommunication and accommodation, in 1993 the government invested 4.8 million Yuan to expand the highway and another 5 million Yuan for a programmed telephone system. Meanwhile, contracts were signed with nine Chinese and foreign companies that would

Table 1. Cultural items and Minority Groups

Ethnic Groups Items to present	Zhuang	Yao	Dong	Miao
Name of village(s)	JingzhuVillage & Longji Village	Baimian Yao Village	Yingshui Village	Model Village at Ailing
Entertainments	Folk Song & Dance, Wedding Ceremony	Religious Ceremony, Folk Song & Dance	Zuomei (Sitting with girls) Folk Song and Dance	Lusheng Dance, “Tiaoxiang ” Religious Dance
Scenic Spots	Terraced fields	Dragon Rock & Pavilion	Waterfalls & Beautiful Lake	Suspension Bridge, Virgin Forest
Architecture	“Malan style” wooden houses	Traditional houses & pavilions	Drum Tower & Covered Bridge	Unique houses
Arts & Crafts	Embroidered ball & checked turban	Batik shirt, hand-stitched work	Silver bracelet & necklace	Embroidered shoes & hats with diagrams of Daoism
Local Food	Sticky rice in five-colors, rice cooked in bamboo cane	Oil-tea	Pickled fish and pickled duck	Oil-tea, Babaguo (made of sticky rice)

infuse 32.5 million Yuan to construct 25 modern hotels with 2,500 beds. The Xijiangping Hydropower Station, a 40-million-yuan project, was put under construction. Hundreds of young people were selected to get training in tourism management in colleges and first-class hotels in big cities. The fervor for developing tourism was high among the government officials and villagers. The improved tourist facilities plus colorful ethnic culture have made the county very competitive in the tourism market, attracting an increasing number of

tourists from home and abroad. The table below shows the fast growth of tourism revenue and arrivals from 1992 to 2000:

	1992	1993	1994	1995	1996	1997	1998	1999	2000
Arrivals (in thousands)	~	139	168	208	253	263	265	273	285
Receipts (in million <i>yuan</i>)	1.03	2.07	4.81	7.65	12.2	19.6	25.1	27.5	29.33

II. Tourism Development in Three Minority Villages

1. The Baimian Yao Village

The Baimian Yao Village is 29 km northwest from the county site, only three kilometers away from the Ailing Hot Spring. Many of the holidaymakers would like to see this Red Yao hamlet after bathing in the Hot Spring. The Red Yaos are easily distinguished from other minorities by their bright red-colored costumes. The village has 36 households with 158 people. In the 1980s, the per capita income was only 200 Yuan (\$25). Though economically underdeveloped, the Yaos cherished the age-old tradition of hospitality. When a family has a visitor, he/she is considered the guest of the whole village. If that family has difficulty in accommodating him/her, other families are more than happy to entertain the new friend.

Tourists began to rush into the village when it formally received group tours in 1993. The hamlet became an attraction of ethnic tourism on the itinerary of Longsheng Tourism Corporation. On arriving at the village gate, tourists are ushered by young girls to the Village Square to enjoy folksongs and dances. Then they are led to different households to taste the local food – especially, oil tea, which is the traditional staple food of Yaos. After the visitors are full, the Yao women would urge them to buy their handicrafts, ranging from batik costumes and embroidered handbags to hand-stitched work. Tourists are expected to pay money if they want to take photos of the Yao people. In 1995, when the whole village earned 90,000 Yuan from tourism, the per capita income rose to 570 Yuan. Four households even bought minibuses or trucks for transportation.

2. Jingzhu Zhuang Village

The Jingzhu Zhuang Village is in Longji Minority Community, which is 20 kilometers southeast of the Longsheng county site. The Longji (Dragon's Back) Tourist Zone is a compact minority community, with 13 villages. Jingzhu is the largest, with the best-preserved architecture. In 1992, UNESCO officials honored it as “the Model Zhuang Village.” The village is perched on the mountain slope about 100 meters above the highway, overlooking a river. Complete ensembles of traditional “Malan Style” houses are well preserved here. Most of them are three-storey wooden structures, with the ground floor given to

livestock and the top two floors to people. A ladder leads to the second floor, where there is a sitting room with a brazier in the middle, and bedrooms are on both sides. The third floor has storerooms for grain or household odds and ends. To the rootless cosmopolitans, coming here could give a sense of rootedness, of returning to the original purity and simplicity of the primitive society.

The village has 154 households with over 700 people. It was also opened in 1993. By 1994 the selling of embroidered balls alone made a profit of 150,000 Yuan, increasing the per capita income to 555 Yuan. In 1998, each household earned more than 1,000 Yuan for selling handicrafts. Now, a third of the families have installed telephones and four households have got minibuses or trucks for transportation. It can be said that tourism has considerably improved the living standard of the locals, who used to live in poverty and isolation.

3. Ping'an Zhuang Village

This village is only six kilometers away from Jingzhu Village, with 738 people in 181 households. The Zhuangs have lived here for centuries. Their "Malan style" wooden houses are similar to those of Jingzhu but built on a much higher and steeper mountain ridge. Besides their traditional architecture and folklore, another spectacular that attracts tourists is the wonderful view of terraced fields, which were built during the Yuan Dynasty (1271-1368 AD). Looking from a distance, the terraces are just like sky-ladders that climb gradually to heaven from 380 meters to 880 meters - an elevation of 500 meters. This magnificent sight of nature and civilization is a paradise for photographers.

The Year 1999 saw the completion of the six-kilometer highway from Jingzhu to Ping'an. Before that, visitors had to climb the 2.5-kilometer-long mountain path. The easy access to the village has encouraged more arrivals. In the last two years, more than 102,000 tourists have visited the village, including 10,000 overseas tourists. To solve the pressing problem of accommodation, the locals began to run family hotels and tourist homes. So far, there are 18 licensed family hotels in Ping'an Village. The hospitality trade has brought considerable income for the local Zhuangs.

III. The Sociocultural Changes Incurred from Tourism

In this paper, we will adopt the definition of culture as "the totality of the following attributes of a given group: shared values, beliefs and basic assumptions, as well as any behavior arising from those of a given group. Culture is understood as a collectively held set of attributes, which is dynamic and changing over time." As to intercultural communication, we define it as "the information exchange between one person and any other source transmitting a message displaying properties of a culture different to the one of the receiver's culture."

The greatest social value of tourism is probably the intercultural communication between the guest and host. The minority communities in

Longsheng have evolved the ensemble of their culture through centuries of isolation and the compulsion of their survival strategies. Historically, cultural change in these communities has been very slow, basically in homeostasis. As a catalyst for intercultural communication, tourism disrupts the equilibrium, accelerates the process of change and promotes the integration of different societies, eliciting active and complex sociocultural responses.

1. Changes in Customs and Traditions

Before the development of tourism, the social mood was simple and honest. The minorities always treated their guests as friends. The thought of measuring everything in terms of money was despised. The community members often helped each other and maintained close ties. The author visited Jingzhu Village a decade ago during the traditional Spring Festival with a small group of overseas visitors. A middle-aged man volunteered to show us around the village from house to house, each giving us a warm welcome by setting off firecrackers. Some families even invited us to have dinner. Just in ten years' time, the old traditions are noticeably weakened under the influence of tourism. Now it is acceptable to charge money for any service - from showing the way to having a photo taken. The intimate relation between villagers is replaced by competition for potential customers. As soon as the tourists arrive, the villagers charge to them just like predators contending for food, hoping to lure some tourists to purchase their goods.

Culture is often described as having three layers. The innermost layer contains the basic assumptions; the second layer includes norms and values. The outer layer, artifacts and products, is the most explicit of all, including food, clothing and architecture. In this respect the change is conspicuous. The minorities used to wear their costumes all the time. The Zhuangs were normally in white jackets (white blouses for women) and black trousers; the Yaos were in red-colored attire with silver necklaces and bracelets. Now, only the old and some middle-aged people still keep this tradition. Due to frequent contacts with the outside world, young people like modern fashion more than the traditional costumes. Living in wooden houses has been a tradition for ages. Influenced by the urbanization trend, in recent years a few families started to build two-story brick flats that they believe are more comfortable to live in than the old ones. Yet, these modern houses look odd in the hamlet. Western food and drink were unthinkable 10 years ago, but now Coke and Sprite are common. Some young people begin to take fancy in McDonald's and Kentucky Fried Chicken. "The Coca Cola Culture" has finally landed on the formerly isolated minority community.

It is observed that age differences within the minorities are correlated with attitudinal differences towards tourists. The young, characterized by curiosity and adventurousness, are more liable to come into contact with tourists, and such contacts change their worldviews considerably. The ostentatious lifestyle

of the western tourists has strong appeal to the young people, who tend to adopt values and morality that are quite different from their traditional ones. In short, it can be said that different sections of the local people adopt different strategies to adjust themselves to the impacts of international tourism.

2. The Commercialization of Culture and Artifacts

The minorities didn't know the great commercial value of their unique culture and artifacts until foreign tourists come to teach them through "demonstration effects." The new spirit of acquisitiveness and the "fast-buck" mentality originating from western countries was first accepted by some young people and then spread to the whole community. Now locals are used to regarding visitors in terms of "dollars," which will help to improve their social and economic well-being. As a result, they actively adapt their culture and art works to meet the needs of tourists.

Case One All the women of Red Yao have long hair (some is two meters long). In the old days, it was unimaginable for them to show long hair to guests, because it was against traditional morals. But one day, a Yao girl, breaking the rule, found it an easy way to get fast bucks from tourists. Soon, others followed suit. On a study tour in 2001, the moment we got to the gate of Longji Terraced Fields, a large group of Red Yao women began to surround us, all asking to show us how they comb their beautiful long hair. After some bargaining, we gave 40 Yuan (\$5) to an old Yao woman, who managed to have a dozen of them give a performance in front of the tourists.

Case Two With hundreds of Chinese and overseas tourists coming each day, Ping'an Zhuang Village is becoming an international village. The Zhuang girls there will offer entertainment, folk songs and dances at any time if you pay a certain sum of money (about \$20). What's more, tourists are welcome to join in performances of wedding ceremonies according to local customs, in which the bride throws an embroidered ball to the man she likes. If the tourist accepts the token of love, the two proceed to the "wedding chamber." This game is to let the tourist experience the romantic love story of the Zhuang people, but the "bridegroom" is expected to pay extra money to his "bride." The more he pays to the "bride," the better the service he will get from her.

Case Three The minorities are very religious people and their religious ceremonies are very sacred to them. Only in special times and special places do they offer such entertainment to their gods in totem masks in the hope of asking for favor and bumper harvests in the coming year. To attract tourists, this program is also included in the repertoire of the village troupe.

Case four Before mass tourism began, embroidered balls, batik clothes and silver bracelets were not commodities. They were for self-use only. Now they are produced in large quantities and each peddlers has plenty of them. They will pursue the tourist until he/she buys something from them. Some silvery handicrafts are poor in quality, losing their significance as souvenirs.

3. Resentment Feelings toward Tourists

It is acknowledged that the differences in wealth and lifestyle between the tourists and hosts may evoke feelings of jealousy and resentment on the part of the hosts. The locals often feel inferior because of material inequality, which is reflected in visitor spending and attitudes. Consequently, they compensate by exploiting the perceived wealth of the visitors. For example, they would charge 30 Yuan for an artwork worth 10 Yuan. Restaurant owners often overcharge foreign tourists for their food in the belief that they are rich and ignorant of the price.

The wedding ceremonies to entertain tourists also arouse resentment, especially among the old villagers. They feel it is a blasphemy to the age-old traditions. They ask: How could our girls be treated in such a way by foreign tourists? A senior villager remarked cynically, "Why not let our young men marry foreign girls according to our customs?" On another occasion, the villagers refused to cooperate with the tourism company when they were asked to fill the terraced fields with water. They complained, "They make money from tourists who come to see our terraced fields, but we have no share in their profits." So, for a period of time, there were a few barren waterless plots on the mirror-like terraces - a pitiful sight to the enthusiastic tourists. In the end, the tourist company had to give in by paying some money to the farmers.

4. Shifts in the Values and Basic Assumptions

The inner layer of culture holds norms and values, and the innermost layer contains basic assumptions, so each of the four minority groups has its own religious beliefs. The Miaos believe in various mountain gods. Every year after the autumn harvest, they invite witches to perform the "Tiaoxiang" Sacrificial Ceremonies, hoping it will bring peace and good luck to the village in the coming new year. The Zhuangs worship their ancestors. Every household has a shrine and incense is burned regularly before the altar to pray for their ancestors' protection. The religion of the Yaos is deeply influenced by Daoism. They believe in the Jade Emperor and many other gods. King Pan, the ancestor of the Yao people, is remembered every year on the 16th day of the 10th month of the lunar calendar. Although the four minorities live very close to each other, they never borrow from each other's faith.

However, the dissemination of western religion by foreign tourists disrupted the spiritual equilibrium. The first encounter with the Biblical Gospel caused great cultural shock among the four minorities, as Christianity is so alien to their native beliefs. Their admiration of Western Civilization has given the minorities a positive view of Western religion. Through self-reflection and adjustment, some locals have started an active transformation process that leads to the change of basic assumptions: the God who made the Westerners rich and strong will also bless us if we trust Him. Converts have completely abandoned their original values and refuse to take part in any traditional activity involving

religious ceremonies. So far, their numbers keep increasing. It is estimated that there are at least a few hundred Christians among the different minorities in Longsheng. The authorities never expected this phenomenon and, for a time, did not know how to deal with the problem.

IV. Solutions to Offset the Negative Influences

Tourism has important effects on the sociocultural transformation. And the globalization that comes with tourism has accelerated the identity crisis, conflicting with localization. As tourism can diminish the effectiveness of local culture as a guide to social behavior, it is vital to effectively control the negative influences and cultural changes if a sustainable tourism is to be achieved.

To realize this goal, the cultural identity should be established first. Cultural identity means the mutual understanding, communication, and respect between different cultures. The developers of ethnic tourism must have a deep understanding of the indigenous culture, knowing the norms, values, likes and dislikes of the minorities. Their self-awareness and self-sufficient spirit developed over ages of isolation should be honored. As to how to inherit, develop and preserve the traditional ethnic culture, the minorities themselves ought to make the decision. Only when the developers and the locals are of the same mind and share the same feelings can they work together to mitigate the negative influences.

Second, a balance should be maintained between development and preservation. Like the tide, culture is dynamic and ever changing. It is impossible to keep the ethnic culture in its primitive state for a long time, because the minorities also need modernization. The point is that development should be suited to the local society and cultural background. When dealing with the delicate issue of what customs should be modified to fit social progress, positive guidance from the government and self-determination by the minority community are equally significant.

Third is to cultivate the consciousness of culture preservation among the minorities. If the locals do not treasure their own cultural tradition, it will soon perish. The preservation of local tradition is not a difficult thing as long as the local people are willing to cooperate with the government. It is necessary to make the people see there are great economic interests in protecting the ethnic culture for developing tourism. The government should make preferential policies so that the economic benefits from tourism are reasonably distributed among the locals. Only when the locals become the master of tourism development and get benefits from it, will they be active in preserving their own culture and tradition.

CONCLUSION

Tourism plays an important role in sociocultural transformation. On the one hand, tourism helps to invigorate the local economy and improve the living standard of the local people; on the other hand, it brings rapid sociocultural changes to the destination community, affecting established habits, daily routines, social lives, values and beliefs. Similarly, tourism weakens mutual help and cooperation based on traditional norms and destroys intimate and friendly relations.

One of the most common consequences of tourism is commercialization, which signifies demanding money for almost everything, which used to be provided free. Thus, the traditional value system based on morality is replaced by one based on money. In this sense, tourism has transformed human relationships into a source of economic gain.

Finally, the local government could play the leading role in creating the right environment for tourism development. Without the proper guidance and a carefully structured plan, tourism promotion can be poorly targeted and developed in a haphazard manner. The current practice of stressing the economic benefits of tourism but neglecting its sociocultural impacts is shortsighted and has caused serious consequences. In the future, any development project must be planned and limited, "for there are usually critical numbers of tourists, which can be integrated into regional economic and social structures and, beyond this, any increase will result in a transformation of these structures." The local community certainly has a limit of carrying capacity, surpassing that boundary will kill the goose that lays golden eggs. Those that only think of today will have no tomorrow.

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