

Research on Tourism Development in Ethnic Regions: Taking Shennongjia Xiaguping Tujia Township as an Example

Jian Wang*

Wuhan Business University, Wuhan, Hubei, China

**Corresponding author*

Keywords: Ethnic regions, tourism development, countermeasure

Abstract: Xiaguping Tujia Ethnic Township is located on the southwest border of Shennongjia, and is a little-known ethnic village. The local area has rich tourism resources and complete service facilities, making it suitable for leisure and vacation tours with the theme of "farmhouse entertainment". However, there are also issues with local tourism development, such as low visibility, severe sinicization of Tujia culture, lack of tourist souvenirs, development of heavy market towns over mountain villages, and low participation of impoverished populations. So the paper investigates the Tujia Township in Xiaguping, identifies the problems in the local tourism development process, and proposes corresponding solutions to the problems in tourism development. It is hoped that the tourism development research of Xiagu Township will provide a certain template for the tourism development of other similar ethnic regions, and play a certain reference role for the tourism development of other villages.

1. Introduction

Xiaguping Tujia Township, located in the southwest border of Shennongjia, Hubei Province, is the only ethnic township in the forest area with profound cultural heritage and distinctive cultural characteristics. Xiagutang Opera, shadow play, etc. are included in the provincial intangible cultural heritage list. It is adjacent to the Shennongjia National Nature Reserve to the east and the Muyu Town, a famous tourist town in Hubei. It overlooks the Shennong River, the first drift in Shenzhou to the south and is adjacent to Yanduhe Town, a key tourist town in Badong County. To the west, it borders the Wushan Three Gorges and faces Luoping Town, Zhuxian Township, and Miaotang Township in Wushan County. To the north, it borders Shennongding and the National Wetland Park's Dajiuhu Lake. However, due to inconvenient transportation and low visibility, the tourism industry here has not yet officially formed its scale [1]. Currently, with the support of national policies, the tourism development in Xiaguping Township is gradually starting to be implemented. As the main supporting enterprise for local tourism resource development, Shenlv Group has also completed a batch of planned tourism projects. In recent years, the township leadership team has conscientiously implemented the Scientific Outlook on Development and closely focused on the strategic idea of "protecting and establishing the township, stabilizing the industry, strengthening

the hydropower industry, revitalizing the township through culture, promoting project revitalization, and enriching the township through tourism". They have worked hard and are committed to transforming location advantages into tourism advantages, transforming cultural advantages into brand advantages, and transforming resource advantages into economic advantages, and vigorously supporting the tourism industry to promote the prosperity and harmony of the people's lives in the entire township[2]. As an original ecological tourism development site, Xiagu Township has great research value. Through the study of Xiagu Township's tourism development, it also has certain reference significance for the future tourism development of other ethnic regions[3].

Table 1: Characteristic Resources of Xiaguping Tujia Township

Name	Content	
Four major historical heritages	Xiagu Legend, Xiagu Tang Opera, Xiagu Shadow Play, and Xiagu Sacrifice	
Four major characteristic resources	Water energy resources	There are a total of 7 rivers of all sizes in Xiagu, especially the Banqiao River Basin, which is one of the four major rivers in the region. The water energy reserves of the entire river are 150000 kilowatts. Currently, there are 79000 kilowatts that have been developed, and the annual output value can reach over 80 million yuan, providing more than 13 million yuan in tax revenue for the country.
	mineral resources	It is rich in phosphorite resources, with theoretical reserves of 20-50 million tons. It is also very rich in iron ore resources, with 10 million tons of iron ore to be developed, as well as rare minerals such as Iceland spar.
	Crop specialty resources	Xiagu is rich in natural resources, including 18 precious medicinal herbs such as Huanglian, Duhuo, Dangshen, and 12 economic trees such as Eucommia ulmoides, Huangbai, and chestnut. It also produces various agricultural specialties such as honey, tea, lacquer, shiitake mushrooms, and more than 10 high-quality agricultural products such as grains and beans.
	tourist resources	Xiagu is an important component of the "one axis, two wings" tourism pattern in the forest region, as well as the core area of the ecological and cultural tourism circle in western Hubei. It is known as the most promising international tourism line, the "Double God Line", which runs through the entire region. It is the intermediate station connecting Shennongjia and Shennongxi, an important node of the "Golden Triangle" that Shennongjia Forest Region strives to create, and a shortcut from Shennongjia Forest Region to the Three Gorges of the Yangtze River.
Four major ecological zones	Natural protection core area, special tectonics area, wild resource enrichment area, vegetation coverage intensive area.	
Four cultural advantages	Buried deep in the local culture of the nation, precious cultural relics among the people, simple customs among the people, traditional morality and cultural heritage deep in the hearts of the people, and a strong cultural atmosphere.	

2. Investigation and Research on Tourism Development in Xiaguping Township

2.1. Verview of Xiaguping Tujia Township

Xiaguping Township is adjacent to the Shennongjia National Nature Reserve to the east and borders on the Muyu Town, a famous tourist town in Hubei. It overlooks the Shennong River, the first drifting town in Shenzhou, to the south and adjacent to Yanduhe Town, a key tourist town in Badong County. It is bordered to the west by the Wushan Three Gorges and faces Luoping Town, Zhuxian Township, and Miaotang Township in Wushan County. It is also bordered by Shennongding to the north and borders the National Wetland Park's Dajiu Lake. The total land area of the township is 216 square kilometers, with 5600 scattered ethnic minorities including Tujia, Miao, Yi, Hui, Tibetan, and Bai. The township currently manages 42 village groups in 6 villages (including 806 households with 3175 people in the protected area, accounting for 52.4% of the agricultural population), with a total forest land area of 256000 acres, farmland area of 16104 acres (including 9790 acres of 25 degree slope farmland), and 13778 acres of returning farmland to forest land. The forest coverage rate reached 88.8%.

Xiaguping Township is surrounded by high mountains and crisscrossed by streams, with a minimum altitude of 398 meters. The climate is pleasant and the folk culture atmosphere is strong. It is known as a "green holy land" and "ecological paradise". Xiagu Tang Opera, shadow puppetry, and other places are included in the provincial intangible cultural heritage list, making it an ideal choice for living and traveling. The characteristics of Xiagu Township can be summarized into four "four"[4]. See Table 1 for details.

2.2. Current Situation of Tourism Development

2.2.1. Background of Tourism Development

In the Western Hubei tourism circle, Shennongjia tourism has both advantages and disadvantages. It has advantages in tourism resources, but also disadvantages in tourism products. Although it has traditional landscape and cultural landscapes, it lacks distinctive comprehensive vacation areas. The tourism characteristics of Shennongjia are positioned as ecological tourism. Although there are many tourist attractions, most of them are tourist attractions that are greatly influenced by the season. In terms of participation in seasonal tourism and tourism content, they cannot be compared with surrounding scenic spots. Therefore, Shennongjia tourism must break seasonal restrictions, increase the content of scenic spots that tourists can actively experience, and improve the attractiveness and pleasure of tourism projects for tourists. Located between the "Yiba" Expressway and the two famous scenic spots of Shennongding and Dajiuhu, Xiagu Township has a superior geographical location. Coupled with its unique ethnic culture, ancient historical culture, and intact ecological landscape, it has found a breakthrough for Shennongjia to break the restrictions of the tourism season and enrich the flow of tourists for tourism projects[5].

2.2.2. The Significance of Tourism Development

Some areas of Xiagu Township are located within the nature reserve area, and protecting and researching the natural ecological resources in this area is crucial for maintaining the integrity of the entire Shennongjia ecosystem. Affected by altitude and climate, the seasonality of Shennongjia tourism is extremely strong. Developing tourism and supporting projects in Xiagu can effectively activate the Shennongjia spring and autumn tourism market and expand the total tourist capacity[6]. As a tourism industry in the service industry, it can effectively stimulate employment in the valley area, improve the income level of local and surrounding people, and drive the development of

related supporting industries and infrastructure upgrades. At the same time, it can also help alleviate poverty and relocate some people in remote areas, helping them integrate into the tourism industry[7].

3. The Problems in Tourism Development in Xiaguping Tujia Township

3.1. The Popularity of Tourist Destinations Is Low and There Is a Lack of Publicity Efforts

The tourism promotion in Xiagu Township is relatively insufficient and the channels are narrow. When searching for relevant materials in Xiagu Township, in addition to some public knowledge on Baidu's website, there are very few promotion platforms specifically affiliated with Xiagu regarding tourism, accommodation, specialties, etc. Although some information about Xiagu, such as economy, culture, festivals, and major events, can be searched on the Shennongjia Forum and Shennongjia website, in addition, There are almost no government websites dedicated to Xiagu Township. A good promotion and marketing channel is an important way to open up the market and shape product reputation. For example, Qichun County, Huanggang City, Hubei Province, relies on the famous resource of medical sage Li Shizhen to establish a specialized tourism government website - China Qichun Government Portal. The promotional slogan is clearly positioned: "Love Li Shizhen, keep healthy until Qichun", and do a good job of "Li Shizhen" to promote health tourism. So Xiagu Township should increase its efforts in publicity. Only by being well-known to the outside world can it open the door to "tourism" and spread the unique ethnic customs and beautiful, leisurely living atmosphere of Xiagu.

3.2. The Localization of Tujia Culture and the Lack of Obvious Ethnic Characteristics

Xiagu Township has strong ethnic attributes and is the only minority village in Shennongjia. It is also one of the three major Tujia townships in Hubei Province. Due to social, economic, cultural, and transportation reasons in the past, the people of Xiagu Tujia have less interaction with external society and are relatively closed. Therefore, the unique Tujia culture has been fully preserved. However, with the development of the economy and the entry of outsiders, the Tujia culture has been greatly weakened. At present, although there is protection and development, there are significant problems in inheriting and promoting culture. How to recruit and introduce performers, enthusiasts, and successors of Tang Opera culture is a dilemma faced by Xiagu Tang Opera culture.

3.3. Lagging Development of Tourism Souvenirs

Xiagu tourism souvenirs have not formed a brand. The climate of Xiagu is pleasant, the grass is abundant and the water is beautiful. The unique natural environment makes Xiagu's crops and cash crop high quality and high yield. There is natural high-quality tea in Taihe Mountain Village, but because no one plants and manages it, the tea garden of about 2000 mu becomes wild tea. The honey brewed by the beekeeping farm in Xiagu, the garlic and konjac grown by farmers, and the unique Chinese medicinal herbs in the local area are all rich in high nutritional value. Compared to other places, such good items can only be hidden deep in the mountains due to the lack of scale and brand formation[8].

3.4. Tourism Planning Focuses on Market Towns and Light Mountain Villages

In recent years, tourism planning has been based on high standards and design, giving Xiagu Market Town a new look. The construction of beautiful rural areas is changing rapidly, and the

number of tourists who have passed and stayed is increasing. The tourism industry in the market town is showing a trend of vigorous development. 63.6% of the residents in the market town have an average monthly income of over 3000 yuan, while only 38.1% of the residents in mountain villages have an average monthly income of over 3000 yuan. Moreover, in terms of income sources and participation in tourism activities, mountain villages are not as good as the development of the market town. Therefore, this highlights the special importance of tourism planning in mountain villages, as proposed by relevant local leaders. Large farmhouses need to be developed, and small farmhouses need to be developed even more. Tourism planning should not be limited to the development of market towns, and the tourism resources of mountain villages should also be included in the overall tourism planning.

3.5. Low Degree of Integration of Residents into Tourism Development

From the survey results, 90.5% of residents believe that they can participate in tourism development with appropriate guidance from the village committee, and 85.7% of mountain village residents are willing to operate activities related to tourism development on their own. However, currently 42.95% of residents still rely on working outside as their main income and have not formed a large-scale rural tourism development model. In addition, residents have a strong awareness of tourism development, but lack certain funds, policies, relevant training in business skills, and government planning and guidance [9].

4. Development Strategies for Tourism Development in Xiaguping Tujia Township

4.1. Shaping the Image of Tourist Destinations and Increasing Publicity Efforts

Under the radiation of tourism resources in Shennongjia, Xiagu tends to rely on the development of scenic areas, but it also has unique ethnic culture and a comfortable living environment for leisure. Therefore, in terms of tourism image positioning, the theme can be "leisure vacation", following the story clues of "ecology folk customs exploration life", towards cultural tourism and interactive experiential tourism, based on the local unique original ecological system, combined with ecological tourism Comprehensive development of sightseeing tourism, folk tourism, and rural tourism. Through certain channels of tourism promotion, it has a great promoting effect on the dissemination of the image of the tourist destination and the improvement of its popularity. The lower popularity of Xiagu is like a wall, and only by using the tool of "propaganda" to destroy this wall can people from outside see and experience the Xiagu style like a "paradise". Therefore, in order to develop the tourism industry, Xiagu must vigorously promote and market through modern media such as newspapers, television, and the internet. In addition, in addition to relying on external media for promotion, Xiagu Township can also use the "celebrity effect" to invite some cultural celebrities, entertainment stars, academic experts, etc. to live and experience here, win the recognition and praise of the "celebrities", and use this as a real and powerful material for external promotion.

4.2. Excavate Tujia Culture and Support Existing Culture

The main factor affecting the tourism development of ethnic minority areas is the cultural resources with ethnic characteristics. The preservation and development status of ethnic art, ethnic architecture, and ethnic costumes directly determine the richness and level of local tourism activities. It can be seen that exploring ethnic culture is a crucial measure for local tourism development. In the excavation of ethnic culture in Xiagu Township, it should be led by the

government, organized by the village committee, and actively participated by residents. For example, Guangyuan Cultural Performing Arts Company can recruit swing dance enthusiasts, arrange dance dramas, and make Tujia swing dance a specialized performance project to increase the viewing value of tourism activities; In terms of ethnic clothing, the government rewards family hotels that wear Tujia clothing, and formulates corresponding reward systems based on the number of people dressed, dressing time, and service quality.

4.3. Design Multi-level Tourism Souvenirs to Form a Brand Effect

The most popular handicrafts in Xiagu are local handmade grass shoes and insoles, but only elderly people in the area wear them, but they are rarely seen for sale. The totem of the Xiagu Tujia ethnic group is the white tiger. They usually worship the white tiger in order to be safe and happy. They believe that the white tiger can drive away evil and suppress evil. They can consider applying it to the development of tourism products, designing a trademark with the white tiger as its symbol, and labeling it on related products. So in the development of Xiagu tourism souvenirs, it is necessary to combine local folk culture to design multi-level and finely packaged characteristic products. For example, in the development of tourism souvenirs, Lichuan Tenglong Cave utilizes the climate characteristics of Tenglong Cave and ethnic patterns. The women's shawls sold in front of the scenic area can not only block the darkness inside the cave, but also establish a good reputation for marketing the scenic area culture [10].

4.4. Developing Tourism Development Models Tailored to Local Conditions

The tourism infrastructure of Xiagu Market Town is complete, with characteristic residential buildings and complete hardware facilities such as commercial streets, banks, and health clinics. It is suitable for carrying out "slow paced urbanization tourism" with leisure, tranquility, and comfort. In terms of operation and management, tourism development is carried out in the interest combination mode of "company+community+farmers". The company and farmers cooperate directly, or the company organizes residents to participate in tourism through cooperation with the community (village committee). Participants must be trained by the company to take up their posts. The company regulates the behavior of participants. In the later stage, with the maturity of family hotel management, star rating can be based on standards such as service quality, health and safety, hardware facilities, and the embodiment of Tujia culture. In addition, the market town family hotels themselves should also have their own innovations in dishes, house decoration, services, and other aspects, each with its own unique advantages.

5. Conclusion

Although the population of ethnic minority areas in China accounts for a small proportion of the national population, they still account for 40% of the impoverished population. Faced with the remote geographical location and backward infrastructure of ethnic minority areas, fully utilizing the unique natural and cultural resources of ethnic minority areas for tourism development is the main support method for ethnic impoverished areas. On the one hand, Xiagu Township is dependent on Shennongjia, a world natural heritage scenic spot. On the other hand, Xiagu's leisurely living atmosphere, suitable climate characteristics, fresh and natural ecological environment, and simple and enthusiastic Xiagu households make it a paradise far away from the hustle and bustle of the world. Therefore, relying on these two major advantages, tourism development in Xiagu can not only drive the economic development of the village, More importantly, the veil that covers up its mystery has been lifted, increasing the local awareness and attracting more outsiders to come and

experience it.

Acknowledgments

The authors would thank for financial support from Scientific research project of Wuhan Business University (“Research on the implementation path of art-enabled rural tourism”, Grant No.2023KY025).

References

- [1] Ma Jing, Zhang Heqing, Wang Leilei. *Confusions of Tourism Development in Minority Villages: Subjects' Appeals and Space Power*. *Academic Journal of Humanities & Social Sciences*, 2020, 3 (9), 04.
- [2] Fan Rui, Cheng Hai. *Research on the Development Opportunities and Restrictive Factors of Tourism Industry in Yunnan Ethnic Areas in the Post-epidemic Era*. *2022 7th International Conference on Social Sciences and Economic Development (ICSSSED 2022)*, 2022.
- [3] Jiang Guanghui, Jiang Yongcai. *Research on the Coordinated Development of Tourism and Rural Revitalization in Minority Areas -Taking Qiandongnan as an Example*. *2022 7th International Conference on Social Sciences and Economic Development (ICSSSED 2022)*, 2022.
- [4] Wang Yuanyuan, Shen Haili, Ye Shun, Zhou Lingqiang. *Being rational and emotional: An integrated model of residents' support of ethnic tourism development*. *Journal of Hospitality and Tourism Management*, 2020, 44.
- [5] Li Xiang, Xie Chaowu, Morrison Alastair M., Nguyen Thi Hong Hai. *Experiences, Motivations, Perceptions, and Attitudes Regarding Ethnic Minority Village Tourism*. *Sustainability*, 2021, 13 (4).
- [6] Xiao Yuchun, Liu Shuiliang, Zuo Jinyou, Yin Ningling, Wu Jilin, Xie Wenhai. *Farmer Households' Livelihood Resilience in Ethnic Tourism Villages: A Case Study of the Wuling Mountain Area, China*. *Sustainability*, 2022, 15 (1).
- [7] Song Huijuan. *The Connotation, Model and Innovative Path of Sustainable Development of Poverty Alleviation through Tourism in Ethnic Areas*. *The 3rd International Conference on Economy, Management and Entrepreneurship (ICOEME 2020)*, 2020.
- [8] Liu Yunglun, Chiang Juice, Ko Penfa. *The benefits of tourism for rural community development*. *Humanities and Social Sciences Communications*, 2023, 10 (1).
- [9] Zheng Yu. *Research on Influencing Factors of National Tourism Development Based on Computer Technology*. *Journal of Physics Conference Series*, 2020, 1574 (1).
- [10] Zhan Zirui, Cenci Jeremy, Zhang Jiazhen. *Frontier of Rural Revitalization in China: A Spatial Analysis of National Rural Tourist Towns*. *Land*, 2022, 11 (6).