Traditional Culture Preservation in Chinese Ethnic Tourism Community

La préservation de la culture traditionnelle dans le tourisme communautaire ethnique chinois

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EDITOR’S NOTE


Introduction

Academia holds different views on the relationship between economic development and the preservation of traditional culture (Mowfort and Ian, 1998; Singh et al., 2003; Liu, 2008; Moscardo, 2008). Tourism changes the pattern of employment and income in host communities. Tourist economy favors behavior more individualists and increase the economic disparities between the members of the communities. There are those who are excluded from the tourist economy and those who work with tourists. Some settle down in a cash economy and the others are excluded from this economy. Tourism generates new types of conflict between community members. Money, new consumptions, arrival of rich visitors create inflation and increase the cost of living. From the economic exclusion...
towards the social exclusion, the marginalization. Cultural challenges are also important, for example with the tourist’s presence at traditional ceremonies, the commercialization of traditional cultures which become objects of folklore. Not forgetting negative environmental impacts, such as the accelerated destruction of ecosystems and the loss of natural resources. That is the interest of alternative forms of tourism, especially ecotourism, community-based tourism (CTB) (Weaver, 2001) in order to face all those challenges. To limit, avoid and mitigate the negative impacts, it is important to plan the tourist development and to control its development with the public authority support and to participate in the community capacity building (Burns, 2004; Wu, 2000; Li, 2004).

The majority agrees that tourism development in China’s ethnic communities is the development of the local economy. Meanwhile, this development also can destroy or weaken the traditional culture. Then, economic development and culture preservation in villages are either interrelated or conflicting each other. However, in the context of the development of tourism, Xijiang Miao Village’s traditional culture is still well preserved in some aspects (Wu, 2001). Compared to other ethnic communities in China, the development of tourism has brought Xijiang Miao Village a brand new form of cultural vitality.

Of course, like other thousands villages in China, especially nowadays when many natural villages in China facing disappearance, Xijiang Miao Village in China is also facing the same problem of development and preservation, of integrating into the market economy and mainstream society.

Photo 1. Xijiang Miao Village

SOURCE: AUTHOR, AUGUST, 2011

1. Rapid development of tourism economy in Xijiang Miao Village

Xijiang Miao Village (Xijiang Miao) is located in northeastern Leishan County, Guizhou Province. It has a total of eight natural villages. According to 2010 statistics, there are 1,330 households with a population of 5,414 in which Miao people amounts to 99.5%
(China Statistic Press). It becomes the world’s largest Miao settlement, therefore it is also called “Thousand Households Miao Village”. The community’s ecological cultural environment remains intact with unique Miao architecture, clothing, silver ornaments, language, traditional foods and customs. Its typical culture contributes vitally to ethnic tourism development and makes the village become a typical model among the ethnic tourism communities in China.

5 Relying on the rich ethnic cultural resources and focusing on tourism development in ethnic villages, Xijiang Miao specializes in silver processing, embroidery, tea and aquaculture species. Especially after 2008, with the large investment by Leishan Government, Xijiang Miao was built into a provincial tourism village. Tourism facilities have been greatly improved and service industries, like cuisine, accommodations and transportation were rapidly developed. In 2010, tourists amounted to 689,500 and tourism income stood at 2.2 billion yuan.

6 The development of tourism brings new opportunities for Xijiang Miao’s socio-economic development as well as industrial transformation. Services industries related to tourism are growing in prosperity and the productivity of labor has increased. More and more villagers can participate and share in the development of the tourism industry. In 2010, there were 138 local businesses, including 49 households with large reception capacity and 25 households with a daily reception of over 100 tourists. Tourism is a source of employment for more than 600 local residents. In 2011, there were 208 locally-owned businesses, 73 businesses with specialty snacks (Rice cake Ciba, rice tofu and so on), 50 businesses featuring traditional clothing, 32 offering photographic services and 50 with traditional crafts. As a result, the local villagers’ incomes increased caused by the tourism economic boom.

7 Second, the development of tourism improves Xijiang Miao’s infrastructure. Resident’s business awareness and abilities increase consequently. The traditional tourism industry in the community has shown a tendency towards sustainable and healthy development.

Photo 2. Some aspects of Miao’s cultural interests
2.1. Miao’s Bronze Drum
2.2. Miao's traditional architecture

![Miao's traditional architecture](image1)

2.3. Miao's family museum

![Miao's family museum](image2)
2.4. Miao’s traditional batik fabric

Source: Author, August 2011.

2. Ways of culture preservation in ethnic tourism community

Traditional culture is rooted in the local community, which is also an economic, cultural and social space. The preservation of traditional culture ultimately can not be separated from the local people. In order to help the villagers understand their own ethnic cultural resources and fully demonstrate Miao customs and cultural identity, it is necessary to help the local villagers in the community to participate in the preservation of traditional culture.

2.1. Reappearance of ethnic traditional cultural activities

2.1.1. Miao traditional songs and dance classes

Organizing the villagers to participate in Miao traditional songs and dance is important to ethnic culture preservation. With financial support from the local government and the Landscape Authority, Miao traditional songs and dance classes are held by the village committee in the community. Some skilled dancers in the village are selected to study Miao songs, Lusheng and dances outside the community. At the same time, local residents who engage in tourism are taught traditional Miao customs by professionals at the tourist reception centre.

On the other hand, local villagers can participate in traditional Miao dance in a public square every evening. They can earn 10 RMB each time from the Landscape Authority for their participation and also can learn about their traditional culture. The original flavor of Miao songs and dances often attract visitors to participate and enjoy with local residents.
2.1.2. Miao embroidery classes

Miao embroidery classes and competitions, which residents participate in regularly, are organized by Village Committees. Top competitors are sent to Beijing to demonstrate their Miao embroidery skills. Many women in Miao Xijiang engage in embroidery both for economic and cultural returns.

2.1.3. Miao cuisine

Under the local government’s support, Xijiang Miao people who manage restaurants can get training on ethnic food culture. It’s helpful to improve Miao’s food quality and services. Meanwhile the characteristics of Miao food culture is highlighted in Miao Xijiang’s tourism industry.

2.1.4. Miao language classes

Although Mandarin Chinese is the most common language in China, the Miao language is still used among Miao people. In order to avoid the loss of the mother tongue among Miao youth, the Village Committee instituted free Miao language classes. Miao elders commonly remain with the larger family unit, allowing them to pass on family traditions and language directly to younger generations, allowing for the preservation of Miao culture.

2.1.5. Miao traditional festivals

Various traditional festivals are organized in Miao Xijiang to share traditional Miao culture and support the tourism industry. For example, Miao holidays, such as basketball matches; traditional bullfighting during the Miao Eating New Festival; the Xijiang Miao Dress Competition; Miao Ancient Songs; Fishing Competition; Embroidery and Lusheng Competition and other folk activities during the Golden Week and Miao New Year. These events attract local and foreign tourists, and contribute to the community’s tourism content. This is especially evident from the festival of Miao Long-table Feast held in 2006, which has since become one of the highlights of Miao culture.

2.1.6. Revitalization of Miao traditional leaders’ roles

Due to historical reasons, the Miao traditional leaders such as the Fanglao and Zhailao almost haven’t existed, yet the Drum Leader are still hereditary and remain today. The Drum Leader is a hereditary leader chosen through the Tang family, who is in charge of religious worship and social affairs in the community such as social morality, public security, etc. The Labor Leader is also hereditary, chosen among the Jiang family, and presides over the community’s agriculture. The development of tourism has given renewed support for traditional Miao leaders in the village.

Photo 3. Opening to the tourism of the Miao's community
3.1. Miao's traditional garment renting in Public area

3.2. Miao's traditional art ware selling
2.2. Impelled by the leaders’ role in preservation of ethnic traditional culture

The leaders’ guidance and decision-making in the public affairs play an important role in the orientation of village development as well as the preservation of ethnic traditional culture. Xijiang Miao still maintains this good tradition and the meetings are often held by Drum Leader, Labor Leader and village representatives to discuss the strategies and measures of village's tourism development and cultural preservation. The Director of the Women’s Committee of Xijiang village, as one of the key persons in villages, is busy with the village affair during the daytime. In the evening, she is engaged in organizing and leading villagers to participate in traditional Miao dance. It can be said that without the leadership of theirs in the village, cultural activities will not be carried out smoothly.

2.3. Impelled by Miao's incentive policies in cultural preservation

In accordance with the relevant preservation of the Xijiang Miao culture, especially to preserve the authenticity and integrity of traditional buildings in Xijiang Miao, the Incentive Policies in Miao’s Cultural Preservation was instituted in 2009 by the Leishan People's Government. Based on the comprehensive survey, registration, and evaluation of the traditional culture of Xijiang Miao by the government every year, a percentage of the cultural preservation funds are extracted from the ticket sales of the Xijiang Landscape Authority. It will be distributed to those working hard to preserve their culture each year. The policy strengthens the preservation of Miao's ancient buildings, encourages villagers to participate in tourism construction and management and gradually helps to establish effective incentive mechanisms for Xijiang's cultural preservation and the village's tourism development. The policy shifts villagers' perception of cultural preservation from "I am asked to preserve" to "I am willing to protect". The social atmosphere is created in which everyone is a cultural master, everyone is involved in cultural...
preservation, and every household becomes a folk museum and cultural preservative spaces. The cultural preservation mode which is called centralized management by Landscape Authority and dispersed preservation by each household is well explored. It’s effective to the preservation of Xijiang Miao’s outstanding cultural resources and to the healthy and rapid development of the Xijiang tourism industry.

In 2011, the incentive funds from the Xijiang Landscape Authority amounted to 5.5 million yuan, an average of more than 4,000 yuan per household. The funds were distributed openly in the people’s meeting. Not only does it improve the transparency of the tourism ticket account and the rating workflow of Xijiang Miao ethnic culture preservation, but also enhances mutual trust between the stakeholders and the consciousness of culture preservation. The villagers are consciously aware of the importance of preservation of traditional culture to Xijiang Miao’s economic, social and cultural development and are willing to work together with the departments of all levels, social forces to preserve the ethnic traditional culture. It is helpful to avoid the damage and loss of Miao culture and promote Xijiang’s tourism development. Based on the benefit of the local villagers, the interactive win-win and harmonious development of the preservation of ethnic culture and tourism economy in Xijiang will be achieved finally.

2.4. Supporting role of the Village Landscape Authority

As the management department of local tourism, Xijiang Landscape Authority also performs the task of preserving Miao’s traditional culture. Not only does it financially support the villagers’ active participation, but it also organizes a variety of cultural activities for tourism purposes. Some scholars hold that these traditional ceremonies and cabaret activities nowadays are considered too commercial and make the traditional songs or dancing lose their original characteristics. For example, some songs can only be sung in the specific ceremony, but now it is frequently sung in front of the visitors every day. Yet these activities are valued by the villagers because they can receive some income by participating in the song, dance and cultural performances organized by Xijiang Landscape Authority. Also they can have an opportunity to show their traditional culture to the public.

2.5. Involvement of third party social forces

Besides above, there exists “Third Party” during the tourism development in the village, including mass media, scholars, research organizations and other social forces. In the process of ethnic culture preservation, the involvement of the Third Party plays a powerful role in supporting the preservation of traditional Miao culture. In 2011, CCTV news channel broadcasted documentary film on Miao traditional culture and activities, including the Long-table Feast, Miao’s hospitable Twelve Blocking-way Wine, original song and dance, and bullfights and folk art. It demonstrates to the outside world the strength of Miao customs, improves the visibility of Xijiang Miao, attracted a large number of visitors, and recorded the whole process of cultural preservation in Xijiang Miao.

As a third party social forces, universities and research institutions also contribute to the preservation of ethnic culture and heritage in different ways. In 2006, with the support and help of Xijiang Town Government, Guizhou Provincial Academy of Social Sciences...
helped to establish the Preservation Base of Miao Cultural Heritage in which embroidery, ancient songs, old Lusheng, folk songs and dances are studied and learned. They also co-hosted folk artists skills contest and promote the enthusiasm of the local villagers' participation.

2.6. Impelled by the good intergenerational tradition in ethnic village

Currently, many ethnic minority areas in China are facing challenges related to the intergenerational transmission of ethnic culture to younger generations. They are separated from the local environment which is the origin of their local knowledge, language, skills and other traditional culture after they leave for school. As a result of it, many minority youths cannot speak their traditional languages and little is known about local knowledge and culture. However, in the Xijiang Miao Village, due to the development of tourism, the parents of most families come back from outside provinces to work in their own community. So the children can stay with their parents every day and have opportunity to learn traditions from their parents.

On the other hand, Xijiang Miao Village still maintains a very good tradition which the elders live with their own children and grandchildren and their endowment and care are mostly provided by their children. It is common for three or four generations of a family in Xijiang living in the same household. The stable family structure, reasonable division of labour within families, and close family ties in Xijiang Miao facilitates the transmission of Miao culture to young generations.

2.7. Combination of ethnic culture and schooling

As an educational organization, schools of all levels play an important role in the preservation of traditional Miao culture. In recent years, cultural teaching is carried out into the classrooms of Xijiang primary school. Cultural activities, such as Miao embroidery classes, Lusheng classes and dance classes are held for the children. Making full use of the spare time, the students are trained and guided to master the Miao folk arts. This ensures the continuation of the intergenerational heritage of Miao ethnic traditional culture and promotes the preservation of the traditional culture efficiently.
3. Preservation effects of ethnic traditional culture

3.1. Enhanced cultural confidence in ethnic community

The effect of preservation of traditional culture and heritage in the process of tourism development is increasingly significant. For example, local residential architecture are required to retain the cultural elements of Miao traditional architecture among both old and new buildings; traditional apparels is mostly remains; a traditional hair style with a pink rose on is still maintained among the Miao women; the conducting of embroidery and other traditional handicrafts by the local women is popularly seen beside the Ciba stalls or in a store; Miao families’ well-keeping tradition which the elders still live with the children and etc. All these are extremely important for the preservation of the intergenerational transmission of traditional culture and Miao language.
Secondly, Miao’s traditional cultural activities do not disappear even in this modern society. Such as Dragon Dance which is to pray for good fortune, well-organized Cockfighting, Tug-of-war, traditional Miao songs competition and other healthy cultural activities.

By experiencing traditions and cultural activities in the community, local villagers can enjoy spiritual happiness from the traditional culture and thus enhancing their cultural self-confidence.

3.2. Enhancing ethnic cultural identity of the local villagers

Before the development of the tourism economy, the villagers were mostly engaged in subsistence agriculture. Many of the young men and women left the community to work in the more developed coastal areas of China. There, they faced a great challenge in term of the intergenerational transmission of Miao culture. The development of tourism in Xijiang Miao has allowed them to return and secure employment in the local village, where they can earn a higher income and greater well-being. In this way, to a large extent, the problem of cultural preservation in Xijiang Miao has been solved. At the same time, the local villagers’ sense of identity and pride in their culture is gradually enhanced by participating in a variety of traditional and cultural activities.

3.3. Strengthening the function of public cultural space in ethnic villages

As a public space of the village, the community is an important carrier for traditional Miao culture, a core space of exchange of information, spiritual and cultural sharing, group belonging and cultural identity of the villagers. The development of tourism provides strong support for the preservation of traditional culture by ensuring that economic, cultural and social activities are held in this economic and cultural space. More villagers are attracted to participate in the tourism industry of their own will, which enhances their cultural self-confidence and highlights the powerful force of this public cultural space in ethnic communities.

3.4. Positive reinforcement between the preservation of Miao culture and the tourism industry

3.4.1. Tourism development promotes the preservation of Miao culture

Miao culture is a crucial part of its tourism industry. The development of Xijiang Miao’s tourism is also a constant process of Miao culture’s development. That is to highlight the cultural characteristics of Miao tourism products and to constantly enhance the cultural taste of the tourism products, such as unique festivals, Miao silverware, embroidery, silk, Lusheng, wooden comb and other tourism commodities. Therefore, the development of Xijiang Miao’s tourism promotes the industrial development of cultural resources in the village. On the other hand, it also promotes the preservation of traditional culture of the ethnic village.
3.4.2. Ethnic culture's preservation promotes the development of the village tourism

The effective conduct of cultural activities allows the village to be full of vitality and traditional culture. It provides more abundant tourism resources for the village and meets overseas visitors’ needs. Then it also largely enhances the tourist attraction and competitiveness of the community and promotes the development of tourism. On the one hand, the preservation of traditional culture promotes the development of the tourism industry. Based on the rich Miao traditional culture, a series of unique cultural tourism products have been developed, such as ethnic traditional medicine, ethnic tea culture, traditional festivals and ethnic film and animation. On the other hand, the preservation of traditional culture impels the improvement of tourism infrastructure in the village and the production and living conditions as well as the life quality of the villagers. It also greatly enhances the capacity of tourism service and lays the necessary foundation for the long-term development of the tourism industry.

Photo 5. Revitalization of Miao traditional culture

5.1. Miao's new architecture
5.2. Miao's traditional wine making

5.3. Miao songs and Dance performance
Conclusion

From the above case study of Xijiang Miao Village’s tourism economic development, it can be seen that tourism and the preservation of traditional Miao culture are not mutually exclusive goals. In the process of rebuilding cultural consciousness among the Miao people, the community can achieve a "win-win" situation with the participatory role of the tourism industry. Therefore, Xijiang Miao’s development can provide experience for other ethnic minority areas in China, and even to underdeveloped areas in the world in the field of the economic development and the preservation of traditional culture preservation.

BIBLIOGRAPHY


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NOTES
1. 1. The statistics cited in the paper are from the investigation by the author in Xijiang Miao Village in 2011.
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ABSTRACTS
Tourism economic development and traditional culture preservation has been a topic of concern and discussion in academic fields. Based on the development of the tourism economy in Xijiang Miao Village of China, the paper focuses on the analysis of the preservation methods and effects of traditional culture in Chinese ethnic communities. Finally, it points out that the preservation of traditional cultures and tourism development in ethnic communities are not always contradictory. Including the community’s participation can help achieve a “win-win” situation for all actors.

Le développement économique du tourisme et la préservation de la culture traditionnelle est un sujet de préoccupation et de discussion dans les milieux universitaires. Basé sur le développement de l’économie du tourisme du village Miao Xijiang en Chine, cet article se concentre sur l’analyse des méthodes de préservation et leurs conséquences sur la culture.
traditionnelle des communautés ethniques chinoises. Enfin, l’étude souligne que la préservation des cultures traditionnelles et le développement du tourisme dans les communautés ethniques ne sont pas toujours contradictoires ; la participation de la communauté peut aider à atteindre une situation "gagnant-gagnant" pour tous les acteurs.

INDEX

**Geographical index:** Chine, Guizhou, Leisha  
**Keywords:** ethnic tourism community, economic development, cultural preservation, community participation, Miao  
**Mots-clés:** développement économique, Miao, participation communautaire, préservation culturelle, tourisme communautaire ethnique

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