

Tourism Management for Ethnic Based Community Tourism in China, case study in Xishuangbanna

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Abstract

Tourism has been regarded as a green industry and part of the green economy for quite a long time. A positive impact of the tourism industry is that it has been regarded as the most sustainable and least polluting industry for developing countries. How to develop tourism management has been discussed among scholars and experts within China and worldwide. As a government report announced in 2016, China is moving into the mass tourism era. Tourism management, especially ethnic culture based mass tourism management has become focused upon greatly. Xishuangbanna Dai Autonomous Prefecture (XSBN), as one of the first tourism destinations in China, has an annual tourism income that contributes over 60% to the local GDP. The Dai ethnic minority group, as the largest aboriginal group in XSBN, invites tourists to view their way of life, traditional culture, etc. in creating a unique and valuable tourism resource. Qualitative research with systematic literature review, participatory observation, and in-depth interviews were applied in trying to explore the ethnic based community tourism management of XSBN. The findings indicated that ‘company + community’ has been applied as the new model for ethnic based tourism management. For the company, it was indicated that the tourism company improved the local people’s living standards and the tourism facilities, etc. The findings also indicated some areas of conflict between the ‘Tourism Company’ and the local residents, such as there being little discourse with local residents in the decision-making process, not respecting local traditions, etc. These conflicts will have an impact upon the tourism management in moving towards Sustainable (Green) Management.

Keywords: Cultural Tourism Management, Authenticity, Stakeholder, Case Study

1. Introduction

China is a country with over 5,000 years of history and after the foundation of the People's Republic of China the central government organized a scheme to classify the Chinese ethnic groups. The undertaking took over 5 years and the Chinese government was able to announce that within China there are over 55 ethnic minority groups and 1 major 'Han' group. 5,000 years of history has created a diversity of colorful culture in China, besides the 'Han' culture, each ethnic minority group may also have their own unique culture, such as the 'Bai ye culture' of the Dai ethnic group, 'Benzu culture' of the Bai ethnic group, 'Dong ba culture' of the Naxi ethnic group, etc. How to develop these multi-cultures has been focused on in China for a long time, with research mainly concerned with education for the multi-cultural regions (Jieyuan, 2011; Ya, 2012; yi, li, & jinsong, 2012).

The Xishuangbanna (to be referred to as XSBN) region is a special region where more than 14 aboriginal ethnic minority groups are located. Furthermore, diversity and colorful culture also accompanies the 14 different ethnic groups in the XSBN area. Due to its special multi-cultural resources, XSBN is also famous for its tourism throughout mainland China. Due to its potential, XSBN established a tourism industry in 1953, and tourism achieved its commercial summit in 2002-2004. The Dai ethnic group with its 'Bai ye culture', the Jinuo and Hani ethnic 'fire culture', etc. are the most attractive points for tourists, and have also made a great contribution towards the local GDP.

How do the local ethnic people manage the tourism industry within the XSBN area? Is there any outside support to assist them in dealing with tourism promotion and marketing? How can they ensure the authenticity of the multi-cultural based tourism industry in XSBN? In order to have a better understanding of these

situated research questions, this paper is divided into three themes. The first theme of is to discover the general background of the XSBN tourism industry. The second theme explores the two tourism managements of the ethnic culture based tourism in XSBN. The last theme offers a case study and interview data as evidence to explore the core factors of tourism management of ethnic cultural based tourism in the XSBN area.

2. Research Method

In order to achieve the research objectives mentioned above, systematic review, participatory observation, and in-depth interviews are applied in this research.

The secondary data mainly covers the tourism annual reports, government annual reports, policy manuals, procedure statements, previous tourism planning, and the reports from the tourism associations at both local and provincial level. The information collected from the various sources was analyzed by documentary analysis methods for a better understanding of tourism in XSBN.

The in-depth interviews mainly focus on the local residents who participate in the tourism management, the tourism companies which join in the tourism development and the management of the culture based tourism.

3. Tourism in the Xishuangbanna area

XSBN is located in the south-west part of Yunnan province, mainland China. XSBN is also known as the gateway facing Southeast Asia. Due to the perfect location of XSBN (bordering with Lao PDR and Myanmar), a focus on boundary tourism by overseas tourists is suitable for operation in XSBN. Furthermore, XSBN is not only the gateway towards the ASEAN community, but also the channel towards South Asia. With the development of the 'Kunming-Bangkok

highway’, this will stimulate XSBN to play an important role in this special location. Moreover, with the development of the AEC + China, tourism cooperation with the GMS countries, XSBN plays an important role in regional cooperation and development (Lixia HUANG, 2013; JIE,2009 ; Ma, 2004).

XSBN is rich in both cultural and natural resources so, based on this situation, XSBN province set tourism as the strategic pillar industry to be focused on. In 2014, the Tourism industry contributed 74% towards the local GDP (XSBN Tourism Administration). Based on this steady growth, local government has largely characterized and recognized its development policies with heavy promotional campaigns and strategies to promote domestic and international tourism as a major source of foreign exchange earnings, employment, opportunities, and as a way to protect both natural and unique cultural resources; this industry is of particular benefit to the lower income groups and rural communities. The tourism sector is an attractive characteristic of XSBN, also becoming its ‘name card’. The success or otherwise of tourism will directly affect the general development of XSBN.

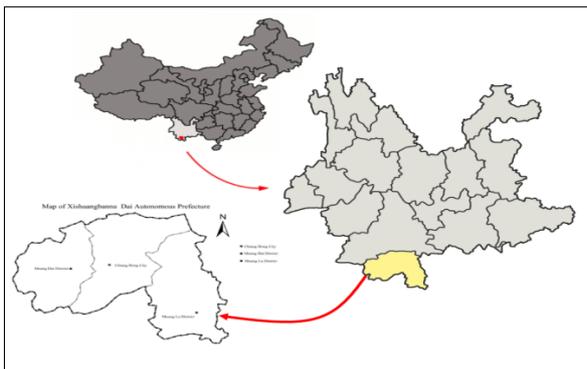


Fig. 1 Xishuangbanna Dai Autonomous Prefecture, PR. China, Created by the author

Based on literature reviews of previous research, in recent years, the tourism flows in China have mainly been focused on unpolluted natural environments, the countryside, farm

land, rural life, and the ethnic cultural scene. XSBN, as the first group of tourism destinations in mainland China with unpolluted air quality, a richness of aboriginal cultures, beautiful rainforest and border life, and a variety of cultural resources attracted 17.01 million tourists, with domestic earnings of around 22.80 billion Yuan (2014).

With the development of tourism, XSBN has become one of the most popular tourism destinations nationally and also attracts tourists from neighboring countries and other locations, such as: Thailand, Malaysia, Japan, Korea, and Hong Kong SAR. The increasing numbers of tourists and earnings will contribute towards the local GDP, develop the local infrastructure, improve the quality of life, etc.

Based on the ‘Twelfth XSBN Tourism Five Year Plan’ report, domestic tourists are the major travelers with most of them visiting from Yunnan province and the Eastern provinces, such as Anhui province, Shanghai, Zhejiang province, and Jiangsu province.

Regarding international tourists, most of them are from the Greater Mekong Sub-region (GMS). Yunnan province is involved with the GMS as XSBN is located at the core of the gateway facing the GMS, taking a very important role in the cooperation with GMS countries. In 2013, around 416,660 international tourists visited XSBN, with tourists from Thailand accounting for around 50% of them.

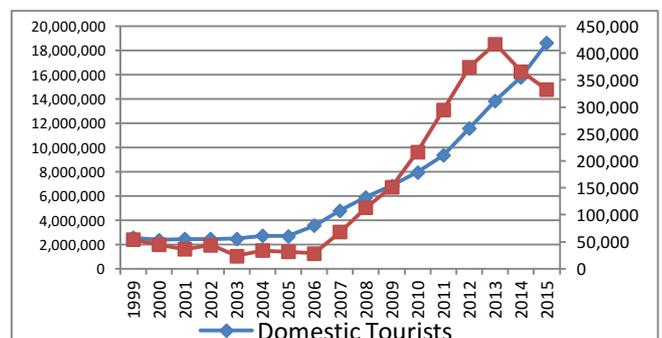


Fig. 2 Domestic and International Tourists Flow

Tourism has been developed in XSBN for over 50 years; as one of the first tourism destinations in China, both its cultural and natural resources have attracted millions of tourists to come and visit XSBN. Moreover, for better development of the tourism industry in the mass tourism era, the government set tourism as their strategic pillar industry to focus on. Based on this steady growth, local government has largely characterized and recognized its development policies and heavy promotional campaigns and strategies to promote domestic and international tourism as a major source of foreign exchange earnings, employment, opportunities, and to protect both the natural and unique cultural resources; this industry is of particular benefit to the lower income groups, and rural communities. The tourism sector is an attractive characteristic of XSBN; it is also its ‘name card’. Whether it is successful or not will directly affect the general development of XSBN.

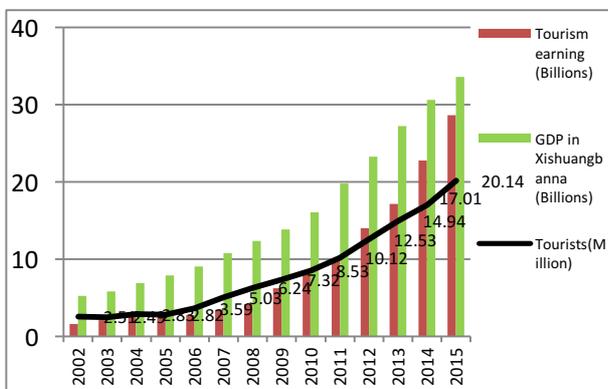


Fig. 3 Tourist numbers and tourism earnings in XSBN

As seen in fig.3, it is indicated that both the numbers of tourists and tourism earnings have rapidly increased. In 2015, the tourism industry contributed 85% to the local GDP (XSBN Tourism Administration). However, some of the weaknesses in tourism management during the mass tourism era cannot be represented by figures or numbers:

a) Tourism destination development not meeting the demands of tourists.

Due to the limitations of tourism regulations in planning and development, the tourism destination planning is concerned more with the economic benefit instead of focusing on the demands from tourists; the tourism attractions management and production designs do not meet the needs of the tourist market (Liang, Lin, & Yulian, 2006; Likun, 2011, 2015; Lin & Jigang, 2012; Min, 2005; Weiwei & Xiao, 2015).

b) Tourism souvenirs and attractions are similar.

XSBN is famous for its rainforest, aboriginal culture, and border life; however, due to the similarity of the tourism souvenirs, it cannot stimulate the tourist’s shopping passion. Since most of the tourists buy their package tour from a domestic tour wholesaler, the similarity of the tourism attractions damage the travelling experience and decrease their travelling satisfaction (Y. Yang & Liang, 2008).

c) XSBN tourism competition decreasing.

Besides the previous negative impact of tourism, local protection might also decrease tourism competition. Local travel agencies use the lowest price to attract tourists, travel agencies from outside are not allowed to be involved in the tourism industry of XSBN, so the increasing ratio of tourists is less than in previous periods, returning tourists are limited when compared with the other tourism destinations in Yunnan province, such Lijiang and Dali(Tian, 2007).

To date, the problems as outlined above are also the characteristics of mass tourism in China; due to the conditions in the country, mass tourism is the most acceptable and

encouraged way to operate tourism¹. As announced in a government report (2016), China is moving into the mass tourism era. How to promote tourism attractions and to manage them in the mass tourism era needs to become a serious focus.

4. Tourism management for ethnic culture based tourism in XSBN

The XSBN area, as the first group of tourism destinations in mainland China with unpolluted air quality, richness of aboriginal culture, beautiful rainforest, border life, and a variety of cultural resources attracted millions tourists. By reviewing the tourism development in XSBN, the researcher found that the timeline of tourism development started in the 1953 and could be classified into four periods.(Luo, 2006; Tingbin, 2007; J. Wang, 2006)

- 1. 1953-1980** was the period of establishing the destination image. A famous documentary film showed the aboriginal people who lived in the rainforest and this attracted scholars and institutes who wanted to conduct research there;
- 2. 1980-1990** was the establishing period of the tourism industry; during this time, XSBN Dai Autonomous Prefecture mainly received foreign delegations, with regard to domestic tourists, most of them were scholars from universities and institutes. In 1985, the local government set up a tourism enterprise to manage the scenic area. The characteristics of this period were foreign delegation receptions and tourism enterprise management.
- 3. 1991-2005** was the rapid growth period, especially after the ‘golden week’ in 1999 and the Kunming Expo; this was when XSBN entered into the mass tourism era. Tourism infrastructures were built;

domestic airports were upgraded for international flights as local government realized the importance of the tourism industry for XSBN as tourism transformed from ‘foreign receptions’ into an ‘Economic Industry’. The tourism industry was announced by the local government as the largest strategic sector in the XSBN region; however, in the years of 2002, and 2004, the number of tourists decreased. Due to this situation, Prof. Bao Jigang, a famous tourism expert in China, announced that XSBN was now in the stagnation stage based on the life cycle of Butler¹.

- 4. 2005-now** is a new period for XSBN. Based on Butler’s life cycle theory, either decline or rejuvenation might take place after the stagnation stage appears. These serious problems also drew the attention of the provincial government. In 2005, Yunnan provincial government announced a ‘Second-wave entrepreneurship’ to try to bring a rebound in the XSBN tourism industry.

An overview of all the culture based tourism attractions in XSBN area would suggest that tourism management could be classified into two categories; local government guided, and ‘Tourism Company + local community’. Observation, secondary data, and in-depth interviews with stakeholders were applied in this part.

4.1 Local government guiding

Government guiding is the major tourism management applied in XSBN and the whole of mainland China (Wu & Li, 2012), especially for the ethnic culture based tourism attractions(Wu & Li, 2012).

Within this management, the local government realized the unique tourism resources, calling

¹ <http://www.xsbnly.com/xsbnly/hyxh/989.jhtml>

on the local villagers to be involved in tourism activities. This type of tourism management relies on trustworthy local leaders, so that an autonomous system can be established.

The benefit of this government guiding is that local government, as the local official representative, could request special support from higher levels of government. This can make tourism attraction reconstruction, upgrading of the tourism facilities, and applying for a special budget, easier (Ai, 2007). Moreover, with government involvement it is easier to expand the social impact. 'Ban Jingfa Dai' village is a beneficiary of this type of management. Before the government became involved in this tourism attraction, few people realized the value of this Dai community. The local government enacted a special policy to support the local facility, expand the social impact, and attract the performing arts companies to operate local folk dance and performances. During weekends and the student holiday season (February, and July-August) hundreds of tourists come to enjoy the local Dai culture, food, and local folk performances.

'I think this is good for maintaining the core of our traditions, the government leaders are voted for by ourselves, so we trust them very well. And I think with this management, we increase income and also let the tourists know more about our traditions and history.'

Local resident, who is involved in tourism and offers a home-stay,

'I think maybe we could have a more development based approach. Yes, of course I admit this is a good way, but if you compare it with other communities, they have outsiders joining in, they can earn more benefit from this.'

Local resident, selling tourism products in the community

Moreover, as the embodiment of the Dai community, the local government also encouraged the local people to maintain their traditional Dai buildings. For them, Dai buildings are the perfect places to operate a Dai home-stay and daily activities with the tourists. Over 50,000 tourists (2014) came to enjoy a local Dai home-stay in Ban Jingfa Dai village, which raised income of 5,384 Yuan per household.

'You see, with the government support, we have more income. This is really good for us, and this year, we plan to buy a car for daily use.'

Home-stay operator in Ban Jingfa village

'For me, I think the most important thing is to keep the traditions, and maintain the authenticity. That is the core element of the cultural based tourism in my village'

Local leader in Ban Jingfa village

Conserving the local ethnic culture is another major objective of the local government, as they understand that authenticity is the core component of the local community and an important pathway towards sustainable tourism development.

Local government guiding could guarantee that the local villagers, as the single stakeholders, share the benefits from tourism activities. Moreover, the local villagers can be involved in the decision making process, to decide the direction of development.

However, this 'Government guiding' also has a weakness, which is a lack of financial support.

'Now I am worried about the money. Tourism is the not the major income for us, after building a new village gate, we do not have extra money left. We operate the tourism by ourselves and we need money to further

support it. '

Local leader in Ban Feilong village

'I used to visit another village where they have a tourism company involved. I think maybe this is a good way to go. Yes, we conserve the traditions and maintain the traditional way of life, but if we cannot give more benefit to the local residents, maybe they will quit their tourism positions, that will make it more difficult to continue.'

Local leader in Ban Chunman village

Due to the conditions of a socialist government, the tourism budget is set in stone, which might prevent the development of tourism attractions. When compared with other tourism attractions, the local people's mobility will be decreased.

4.2 'Tourism Company + Local Community'

Besides the government guiding, there is another tourism management method in XSBN that could be identified as a different style of ethnic cultural based tourism management. Moreover, under the mass tourism era, this management is regarded as the 'best way to balance the stakeholders' in China.

'Tourism Company + Local Community' management has been operated in the XSBN area for over 15 years, which brought the tourism attractions, especially the ethnic tourism attractions into commercial success (Jiana & Wei, 2011; Jun & Xiaohui, 2012; Ping & Shaoying, 2006; Qinglei, Ying, & Qingzhong, 2010; Wen & Zhenfang, 2011). The 'Tourism Company + Local Community' tourism management is mainly applied in the ethnic culture based tourism attractions, such as Dai Park, Muang Jinglai Dai community, Hani ethnic museum, etc.

A tourism company is specifically a company that focuses on tourism development, tourism

promotion, and tourism attraction management. Under China's current situation, Tourism Companies have two categories, 'State owned Enterprise' and 'Private Tourism Company'. Offering financial support to operate the tourism activities and maintaining tourism constructions, upgrading the community's public facilities, and hiring local villagers to be part of the tourism activities, etc. are the major operating methods of a tourism company.

State Owned Enterprises (to be referred to as SOE), due to their government background, have more advantages in dealing with tourism attractions. In the XSBN area, SOE Tourism Companies control most of the ethnic culture based tourism attractions and nature based tourism attractions. Moreover, an advantage for these SOE tourism companies is in policy support (Jizhen, 2013), such as tax free tourism attraction reconstruction, updates to tourism facilities, and ease of applying for special budgets (Ai, 2007; Dianting et al., 2003).

With the government involved in the Tourism Company, it will be of benefit to the development of tourism attractions under government supervision. With government support, the tourism attraction could expand market awareness and so attract more tourists (Ruhui & LING, 2009; Wenwen, 2006).

Regarding the second category of 'Tourism Company', Private Tourism Company (to be referred to as PTC), these also play an important role in tourism management in the XSBN area. As XSBN is one of the first tourism destinations in China, tourism has been operated for over 50 years, in order to better stimulate tourism development in XSBN, local government set in place some policies to encourage and guarantee private tourism companies to become involved in tourism management (Shaohua, 2003). Compared with the SOE, a PTC is more flexible in applying and using its budget (Shaohua, 2003).

For the villagers, specifically the ones who

remain inside the ethnic communities of the XSBN area, they offer landscapes, their traditional buildings as a living museum, the natural environment, traditional way of life, historical Theravada Buddhism religion, and colorful ethnic culture as a background for the Tourism Company to operate related tourism activities.

From scholars' research and the tourism earning evidence it has been indicated and proved that 'Tourism Company + Local Community Management' provides the most successful operating experience in ethnic cultural Tourism and rural tourism in China (Ai, 2007; Liang Huang, Lu, & DIng, 2006; Wu & Li, 2012; ZHANG & TENG, 2006), and also contributes to the local tourism industry.

5. Case study

Dai Park is the most famous and 'must visit' tourism attraction in XSBN, and is where the tourism company became involved in 1999. Before tourism company involvement, Dai Park had already been famous among scholars, anthropologists, and sociologists. However, 'famous' does not mean it was a commercial success. From 1999, after the SOE tourism company became involved, Dai Park began to attain commercial success from tourism.

The Dai garden management history can be identified in 4 periods²,

- 1998-1999 was the initial period. As a selected, well-conserved Dai community, Dai Garden drew lots of attention from around the world. The local community received a loan for their financial budget from the government. However, as local villagers lacked operating experience, the villagers were only partly involved in tourism activities.
- 1999-2001, Tourism Company Involved. The Provincial Agronomic Group

established a company to help the local villagers to deal with tourism activities.

- 2001-2011, Rapid Development. In 2001, the National Tourism Bureau certified the Dai Garden as a 4A level tourism attraction. After that, millions of tourists came and visited this well-conserved Dai community.
- 2011-now, Change of Tourism Company. In 2011, Yunnan Provincial City Investment Company (YPCIC) replaced the Provincial Agronomic Group, to become the new managers. YPCIC is a SOE under provincial control.

With the tourism company as the main manager, in order to better conserve the Dai culture, they offer 20,000 Yuan for each household in supporting them to maintain their traditional Dai building³, provide a stimulus policy to encourage local people to operate a Small-Medium-Enterprise, such as a Dai Home-stay, Dai restaurant, etc. For people whose farmland was requisitioned, the tourism company will offer a living allowance and hire them to be their employee. Moreover, the company shares 15% of the benefit from the entrance tickets(Wu & Li, 2012)⁴. In 2010, the average income of a Dai home-stay was 200,000 Yuan per year, which has increased 20 times with the tourism company involvement. In general, with the tourism company involvement, this ethnic culture based tourism attraction is stimulated to another peak⁵.

² Data collected during Sept.2015 to Apr 2016

³ <http://www.mypcera.com/xin/1/shengxiao/21/4286.html>

⁴ http://www.kuaida.net/menpiao/MenPiaoZiXun_239.aspx

⁵ <http://www.jhtravel.gov.cn/newshow.aspx?id=29325>



Fig. 4 Dai Home-stay and restaurant

'The tourism company set a regulation; the local residents cannot build a modern style house. We are a Dai village, we have to keep the traditions and maintain the core of the Dai culture.'

Local leader in Dai Park

'You can see the difference with and without the tourism company involved. I have stayed in this village since I was born. Before the tourism company was involved, we did it by ourselves, and the income was not that high. In 2002, the tourism company got involved, they invited the government, as an agent, to balance the relationship, and support the local residents to keep their traditions and invited the local people join the tourism industry. This is good.'

75 years old, local resident in Dai Park

As their traditional culture is the core and soul of the Dai ethnic group, to better conserve the intangible historical heritage, the tourism company supported an application to apply for national level heritage certification. They also support local youth to study their intangible cultural heritage.



Fig.5 Dai historical intangible cultural heritage (National Heritage)

With its government background, improving the local social welfare was also important for this tourism company. Hiring local villagers for tourism activities could help them to improve their living standards, and have a better life.

Department	No. of total positions	No. of local villagers	Percentage
Office	34	16	47.05%
Management	99	57	57.57%
Environment conservation	98	70	71.42%
Tour guide	120	87	72.5%
Folk performance	258	198	76.74%
Total	609	428	70.27%

Table 1 Numbers and percentages of local villagers involved in tourism activities⁶

'I think that tourism helps us a lot, especially for improving the living standard. Previously our lives relied on rice and rubber tree plantation, now we have another choice. Moreover, the SOE share the entrance fee with us, they hire some of the local villagers as management and folk dancers, that is also good for us'

Local villager, 75 years old

'The tourism company helps the local villagers involved in tourism activities, it is a good phenomenon. I think it should expand to the whole of China.'

⁶ Data from author's field research in Spet,2015-Apr.2016

Tourist from Beijing, female

'The tourism company is involved to develop and manage the colorful culture resources, it was not as commercialized as I expected. I think it not only conserves the traditional culture, also helps to improve the living standards for local people.'

Tourist from Shanghai, male

'The aim of this approach is that we offer financial support, the local villagers offer their living space. Then we cooperate with each other, to achieve a win-win success.'

Manager of Dai Park

Dai Park has been managed for over 18 years during which the entrance fee has risen from 10 Yuan/person in the beginning to 100 Yuan/person (2015). Tourist arrivals have increased from 250,000/ year in the beginning to 600,000 /year. The villagers' income has increased from 1,708 Yuan/year to 7,678Yuan/year (2015), which is greater than the local average⁷. The statistics indicate that the 'Tourism Company + Local Community' solution as implemented in this tourism attraction, brings the tourism attraction commercial success while ensuring conservation of the traditional culture⁸(Chen, 2010; Likun, 2015; L. Yang, Wall, & Smith, 2008; Zuo, 2012).

6. Conclusion

The 'Tourism Company + Local Community' solution has become popular since the 1990s, the company provides financial support to maintain the tourism facilities and offers employment opportunities to the local community; local villagers offer their living

space, cultural heritage and traditional festivals, etc. to attract the tourists.

Based on the special tourism conditions currently in place in China, this management style is unique and only practiced in the Chinese tourism industry; over 10 years of operating experience has indicated the success of this management system for culture based tourism management, 'Tourism Company + Local Community' has achieved great success, both commercially and through increased living standards. Moreover, this management style has also set a great example in conserving the tangible and intangible heritage.

Regarding negative impacts, when managing tourism in the mass tourism era, NGOs such as the tourism association should be involved so as to supervise and provide guidance for the tourism management. The Tourism Association, and some other NGOs, should play the role of agent between the Tourism Company and the local villagers, speaking on behalf of the local villagers in negotiating with the tourism company while also promoting the company's regulations to the local villagers.

To date, the positive impact is already obvious and outstanding. For managing mass tourism, especially cultural based and rural tourism, this "Tourism Company + Local Community" should be promoted and applied.

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⁷ The neighboring district's average income is 7,012. The yearly income in Dai Garden is higher than the neighboring district.

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