

# **The Interactive Relationship between Tourism Development and Changes of Ethnic Culture from the Perspective of Cultural Changes in Ethnic Tourist Destinations**

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**Keywords:** ethnic tourist destination; cultural change; tourism development; interactive relationship.

**Abstract:** This paper summarizes and analyzes the cultural changes in ethnic tourist sites. On the basis of studying the influences of ethnic tourism development on the changes of "tourism culture" and "real-life culture" as well as the influences of culture changes on tourism development, the interaction between ethnic tourism development and the changes of ethnic culture are analyzed to get a clear understanding on the external contradiction and internal agreement between the two factors, and to explore the foundation of coordinated interaction between cultural changes and tourism development.

## **1. Introduction**

Since the 1970s, the impact of tourism development on the social culture of ethnic tourist destinations has been a research focus. "Whether the traditional culture should change" and "how to change" are hot topics of discussion. Through continuous in-depth discussion and analysis, scholars and the public have reached consensus on the basic relationship between tourism development and cultural changes to certain degree: regardless of tourism development, the changing of ethnic culture is an irreversible trend under the background of modernization and globalization; in ethnic tourist destinations, tourism development serves as the "accelerator" or "catalyst" in the process of culture changes. The cultures of ethnic tourism sites are transforming in that situation. Now the focuses of researchers are, to explore a value judgment method which can rationally screen the impacts of tourism exploitation on the development of national culture, and to actively seek and build a "reasonable" model which can achieve the balance and win-win situation between "tourism development" and "cultural changes" on the premise of value judgment. At present, tourism development is generally recognized as the "best" mode in helping ethnic tourism sites to become rich. The foundation of ethnic culture and ethnic tourism development is the maintenance of characteristic traditional cultures. The coordination and balance between tourism development and culture maintenance relate to the sustainable development of ethnic culture and tourism. Therefore, how to keep the features of traditional national culture and how to coordinate the "contradiction" between the weakening "characteristics" and the sustainable development of tourism become new research hotspots.

## **2. Cultural Changes in Ethnic Tourist Destinations**

In the trend of globalization and modernization, the development of tourism in ethnic minority areas provides objective conditions for the preservation of ethnic cultures. It also injects new vitality into the development of ethnic cultures, provides impetus for the inheritance of ethnic cultures, and provides a place for the display of ethnic cultures. Traditional culture in ethnic tourist destinations is the major resource of ethnic tourism; its attraction is the premise of tourism development. "Culture products, both concrete objects and intangible spiritual fruits, have the objective basis for developing into unique tourism resources." In order to generate attraction, tourism professionals must fully realize the role of cultural value, excavate local cultural resources, refine cultural products through

cultural reconstruction, and appropriately express the intangible cultural connotation through specific forms. With the development of tourism in the context of globalization, national culture becomes the capital of local tourism economy and can be transformed into wealth; the interaction between external culture and local primitive culture is deepening constantly. As a result, the ethnic culture begins to split into two parts. After the commercialized and artistic changing process, traditional culture becomes a part of tourism culture; modern culture replaces the tradition and becomes a part of real-life. In one article, Professor Li put forward the viewpoint that the changed tourism culture and the real-life culture together constitute the new and modern culture in ethnic tourist destinations, and concluded the process of cultural changes in ethnic tourist destinations as follows.

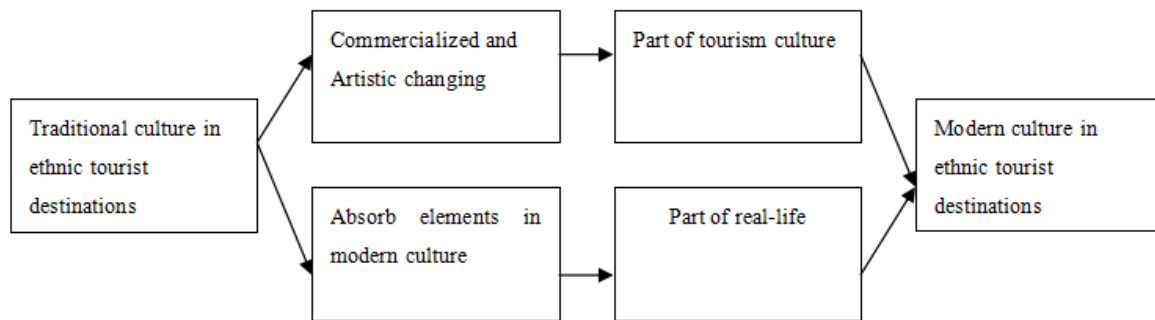


Figure 1. Cultural changes in ethnic tourist destinations

Changes in tourism culture and real-life interact and influence with each other and make up a complex changing system. For tourism culture and real-life changes in ethnic tourist destinations, although they have different meaning and influences, modernization is the development prospect they both share. This part of tourism culture exists as a symbol of national culture. It can greatly improve national confidence, evoke the sense of consciousness and national pride, and become the new starting point and basis for the reproduction of national culture. In real-life, this part of traditional culture may gradually disappear in modern civilization, or deliberately absorb some elements in tourism culture and be strengthened.

### 3. Changes of Ethnic Culture in the Context of Tourism Development

Under the background of tourism development, the characteristics of national culture can be restored and developed in the process of realizing "tourism values". This process can be regarded as "commercialized" and "acting" restoration and development at the cost of losing the traditional cultural soil. But essentially, it provides national culture which has been inherited for thousands of years with new soil and environment for development; the ethnic culture is bound to grow and develop in new forms.

#### 3.1 The impacts of tourism development on changes of "tourism culture"

As tourism resources, "the commercialization of national culture is the proper meaning of ethnic tourism development". In the environment of market economy, the development and utilization of ethnic cultural tourism resources is to produce, to pack and to market the original ethnic culture in accordance with the rules of commodity production and market economy, so as to obtain the greatest economic benefits. Once national culture appears in the tourism market, it does not have the original form any longer. It becomes a new form of tourism cultural commodity which can be bought. Tourism industry can produce, operate and sell culture; in essence, tourists' traveling is a process of purchasing, consuming and enjoying culture. Therefore, from the perspective of tourism market operation, the lowest level of competition is price competition, which is also the common form of competition; the highest level of competition is cultural competition, which requires national tourist destinations to constantly improve their cultural tastes, improve the artistic effects of cultural expression, and endow ethnic cultures with artistry. The so-called "artistry" contains two levels of meaning. First, since the environment of traditional culture has changed, the function and meaning of

traditional culture should also change. That is, the form of traditional culture still exists and has been strengthened in a sense, but its meaning and functions have changed. Second, due to social changes, the original traditional culture cannot adapt to real-life any longer. It has to be dissociated from the real-life and become a kind of "acting" culture or national identification art.

Therefore, in the process of tourism development, traditional culture, as a kind of tourism resource, becomes a part of tourism culture after the commercialized and artistic changing process. Tourism culture changes in the process of constantly improving the cultural tastes and artistic effects of tourism cultural products. Usually, this kind of cultural change can be realized through the forms of traditional culture revival, cultural function transformation, traditional culture reconstruction and innovation when the ethnic identification is reinforced. Of course, the revival, reconstruction and innovation of traditional culture are divorced from the original living environment of ethnic culture; the purpose of revival and innovation is tourism development. The connotation and functions of culture transform fundamentally. However, based on the purpose of tourism development, the commercialized and artistic development of national culture will inevitably lead to the transformation of traditional culture. For instance, traditional religious customs and celebration activities should be held in specific time and place, and be carried out according to specific content and methods. But in the commercial tourism, in order to satisfy tourists' curiosity and meet their needs, religious customs, festivals, rituals and other activities are held regardless of traditional rules. They become dishes which can be "cooked" at any time and put on the "table" of guests. The production process is a complete performance. In this process, the existence foundation and connotation of traditional culture become superficial, or even deviate from its development track. The sustainable development of traditional culture and the maintenance of cultural features are negatively affected. Therefore, the changes of tourism culture pose a new challenge to tourism development.

### **3.2 The impacts of tourism development on changes of "real-life culture"**

From the process of cultural changes caused by tourism development, it can be seen that the real-life culture in traditional culture is constantly absorbing elements in modern culture and moving towards modernization. Influenced by the irreversible historical trend of globalization and the development of tourism, ethnic tourist areas are continuously injected into modern civilization elements, which accelerate the process of modernization of ethnic minority cultures. Similarly, from the process of national cultural changes, it can be found that the part of traditional culture in real-life can absorb some elements in modern culture, and cause the changes of real-life culture. It is manifested in the changes of ethnic cultures. An example is, with the deepening of Tibetan modernization process and especially the development of tourism, monks have more exchanges with the outside world and even make a lot of friends. A Lama from Wudu once said, "I know a lot of friends. I often contact with them since I have a mobile phone. The telephone expense is 40 to 50 yuan a month." In addition, young and middle-aged monks have more modern concepts as well as science and technology awareness. Many monks in the monastery have televisions and can watch all kinds of programs. Some Lamas are even equipped with computers.

## **4. Tourism Development in the Context of Ethnic Culture Changes**

### **4.1 The impacts of "tourism culture" changes on tourism development**

There are numerous examples on the negative impacts of tourism cultural changes on tourism development, since they usually reduce cultural "characteristics" and make tourism development encounter "bottlenecks". But on the other hand, for the vast majority of foreign tourists, ethnic cultures are so sacred and mysterious. Although tourism development and the "interpretations" on ethnic cultures make cultures "commercialized", "playful" and "secularized", they also make cultures easier to be understood. It is of certain positive significance to the enhancement of tourism attraction.

## 4.2 The impacts of "real-life culture" changes on tourism development

The real-life culture in national culture constantly absorbs the elements of modern culture and tends to be "assimilated", which has double-sided impacts on the development of ethnic cultural tourism. On one hand, "assimilated" culture removes some cultural features and makes the ethnic culture become less attractive, thus hindering the development of tourism. On the other hand, the "assimilation" process promotes the "modernization" of national culture. For instance, modern science, technology and media provide more channels for the heritage and dissemination of national culture. The very "modern" way of life adopted by residents in ethnic tourist destinations also changes their concepts and emotional activities subtly. That is to say, people's extrinsic living style can determine their inner life; the material life, social life and the mode of production can determine the concepts, consciousness and emotions of human beings. Besides tourists, the development of tourism also brings a more comfortable and affluent lifestyle from the outside world, which stimulates the desire of local minorities to "pursue". Moreover, tourism development takes local traditional culture as a kind of resource. Through transformation and processing, it can be transformed into commodities. Tourism associated with a variety of industries can help local people to realize commodity exchange with outside world and "catch up" with the modern lifestyle. As market consciousness and commodity concept come along with tourism activities, local people become confused when faced by the contradiction between feelings and interests. But they ultimately choose to enter the market and gradually establish the market economy awareness. These changes also play a role in the real-life culture of ethnic tourist destinations.

At present, the main goal of tourism development is to maximize economic benefits. The change of traditional culture in ethnic tourist destinations is very important to the sustainable development of tourism, but its economic value is difficult to quantify. Thus, there are many difficulties and contradictions in combining cultural changes with tourism development system and realize the coordinated and mutually beneficial coexistence. By deeply exploring the relationship between cultural changes and tourism development as well as their mutual influences, this paper shows the external contradiction and internal agreement between cultural changes and tourism development. That is the foundation of exploring coordinated interaction methods, and the basis for maintaining the features of traditional ethnic culture and keeping the sustainable development of ethnic tourism.

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